

POEMS  
1912-1932



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# P O E M S

1912—1932

BY

EDWARD SHANKS

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TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
JAMES MURRAY ALLISON  
AND  
THOMAS MICHAEL POPE

## PREFACE

It is not easy, as I have now discovered by repeated experiment, to write a preface to one's own Collected Poems without falling into an alarming portentousness or without, at best, seeming to claim for them what their writer has no business to claim. But it is equally hard to let what may be a final collection go out with no word attached to it.

I may perhaps be allowed to explain why, having on a previous occasion used a different method, I have in this volume followed a chronological arrangement. It is because more and more these pieces appear to me in the light of a spasmodic and fragmentary diary. This does not mean that anyone else is intended to or could read in them a connected or even an intelligible narrative. It does mean that not one was written without a definite personal cause, still vivid in memory, and this to me suggests that the order of time will make the most convenient framework. It may be worth while to add that the longer pieces fitted with unexpected accuracy into this arrangement.

I may perhaps be permitted to offer also, since the psychology of literary composition is still so largely

an unexplored field, some remarks on my fear that this may be a final collection. The dates at the head of the different sections tell their own story. In the three years, 1922-1924, there were twenty-five poems; in the eight years, 1925-1932, there were only twenty.

In saying this I neither imply nor invite any judgement on the merit of the poems concerned. But here we have an instance of a faculty, good, bad or indifferent, but valued by its possessor, dwindling without that possessor being able to discover why it should do so. His desire to write verse is no less than it was, his other cares and pre-occupations are the same in gravity, his life perhaps more varied and interesting. But neither desire nor effort of will can any longer draw verse from him.

I am not, be it understood, offering myself as a subject for the psychological laboratory. But this seems to me to be an opportunity for drawing attention to a field for psychologists which they have hitherto relatively neglected. Poetry is produced by an effort of the mind and the nature of that effort is open to examination. The mental process by which it is produced bears at many points a close resemblance to the processes of the dreaming mind, which have recently proved so fruitful in suggestions, even if some of these suggestions remain enigmatic. I am convinced that a following of this clue would not only result in

an addition to our knowledge of the human mind but would also be all to the good of literature. It helps no one, either writer or reader, to suppose that there is something magical or ultimately inexplicable about any poetry, even the highest. Shakespeare and Tupper wrote under the same laws—one with more success than the other.

. . . . .

The original volumes, most of the contents of which are reprinted here, are: *Songs*, 1915; *Poems*, 1916; *The Queen of China and Other Poems*, 1919; *The Island of Youth and Other Poems*, 1921; *The Shadowgraph and Other Poems*, 1925; *The Beggar's Ride*, 1926. I am indebted to the publishers of the second of these volumes, Messrs. Sidgwick & Jackson, for permission to reprint here a considerable number of the poems which make up my first and second sections, and to Mr. Martin Secker, the publisher of the third volume, for permission to reprint the remainder of the poems in my second section, some of those in the third, and the first three of the longer pieces. Of the poems in the last section, the first two appeared in my *Collected Poems*, 1926. The remainder have not before been printed in book form.

E. S.

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1912-1914

## LOVE IN THE OPEN AIR

I'LL love you in the open air,  
But stuffy rooms and blazing fires  
And mirrors with familiar stare  
Cloak and befoul my high desires.

The dearest day that I have known  
Was in the fields, when driving rain  
Was like a veil around us thrown,  
A gray close veil without a stain.

The young oak-tree was stripped and bare,  
But naked twigs a shelter made,  
Where curious cows came round to stare  
And stood astonished and dismayed.

Let it be rain or summer sun,  
Smell of wet earth or scent of flowers,  
Love, once more give me, give me one  
Of these enchanted lover's hours.

## ODE ON BEAUTY

INFINITE peace is hanging in the air,  
Infinite peace is resting on mine eyes,  
That just an hour ago learnt how to bear  
Seeing your body's long-dreamt harmonies.  
The gray clouds flecked with orange are and gold,  
Birds to their rest are falling, falling, falling,  
And all the earth goes slowly into night,  
Steadily turning from the harshly bright  
Sunset. And now the wind is growing cold  
And in my heart a hidden voice is calling.

Say, is our sense of beauty mixed with earth  
When lip on lip and breast on breast we cling,  
When ecstasy brings short bright sobs to birth  
And all our pulses, both our bodies sing?  
When through the haze that gathers on my sight  
I see your eyelids, know the eyes behind  
See me and half not see me, when our blood  
Goes roaring like a deep tremendous flood,  
Calm and terrific in unhasty might,  
Is then our inner sight sealed up and blind?

Or could it be that when our blood was colder  
And side by side we sat with lips parted  
I saw the perfect line of your resting shoulder,  
Your mouth, your peaceful throat with fuller-  
hearted,

More splendid joy? Ah poignant joys all these!  
And rest can stab the heart as well as passion.  
Yea, I have known sobs choke my heart to see  
Your honey-coloured hair move languorously,  
Ruffled, not by my hands, but by the breeze,  
And I have prayed the rough air for com-  
passion.

Yea, I have knelt to the unpiteous air  
And knelt to gods I knew not, to remove  
The viewless hands whose sight I could not bear  
Out of the wind-blown head of her I love.  
Ecstasy enters me and cannot speak,  
Seizes my hands and smites my fainting eyes  
And sends through all my veins a dim despair  
Of ever apprehending all so fair  
And I have stood, unnerved and numb and weak,  
Watching your breathing bosom fall and rise.

Ah no! This joy is empty, incomplete,  
And sullied with a sense of too much longing,  
Where thoughts and fancies, sweet and bitter-  
sweet,  
And old regrets and new-born hopes come  
thronging.  
Man can see beauty for a moment's space  
And live, having seen her with an unfilmed eye,  
If all his body and his soul in one  
Instant are tuned by passion to unison  
And I can image in your kissing face  
The eternal meaning of the earth and sky.

## SONNET

O DEAREST, if the touch of common things  
Can taint our love or wither, let it die.  
The freest-hearted lark that soars and sings  
Soon after dawn amid a dew-brushed sky  
Takes song from love and knows well where love  
    lies,  
Hid in the grass, the dear domestic nest,  
The secret, splendid, common paradise.  
The strangest joys are not the loveliest;  
Passion far-sought is dead when it is found,  
But love that's born of intimate common things  
Cries with a voice of splendour, with a sound  
That over stranger feeling shakes and rings.  
The best of love, the highest ecstasy  
Lies in the intimate touch of you and me.



## THE CUP

As a hot traveller  
Going through stones and sands,  
Who sees clear water stir  
Amid the weary lands,  
Takes in his hollowed hands  
The clean and lively water,  
That trickles down his throat.  
Like laughter, like laughter,

So when you come to me  
Across these parchèd places  
And all the waste I see  
Flowered with your graces,  
I take between my hands  
Your face like a rare cup,  
Where kisses mix with laughter,  
And drink and drink them up  
Like water, like water.

## SONG IN TIME OF WAITING

BECAUSE the days are long for you and me,  
I make this song to lighten their slow time,  
So that the weary waiting fruitful be  
Or blossomed only by my limping rhyme.

The days are very long  
And may not shortened be by any chime  
Of measured words or any fleeting song.  
Yet let us gather blossoms while we wait  
And sing brave tunes against the face of fate.

Day after day goes by: the exquisite  
Procession of the variable year,  
Summer, a sheaf with flowers bound up in it,  
And autumn, tender till the frosts appear  
And dry the humid skies;  
And winter following on, aloof, austere,  
Clad in the garments of a frore sunrise;  
And spring again. May not too many a spring  
Make both our voices tremble as we sing!

The days are empty, empty, and the nights  
Are cold and void; there is no single gleam  
Across the space unpeopled of delights,  
Save only now and then some thin-blood dream,  
Some stray of summer weather;  
The tedious hours like slow-foot laggarts seem,  
When you and I, my love, are not together

And when I hold you in my arms at last  
The minutes go like April cloudlets past.

And yet no hidden charm, no desperate spell  
Can make these minutes longer, those less long:  
No force there is that yearning can impel  
Against the callous years which do us wrong.  
No words, no whispered rune,  
No witchery and no Thessalian song  
Can make that far-off, misty day more soon.  
The bravest tune, the most courageous rhyme  
Fall broken from the bastions of time.

A long and dusty road it is to tread;  
Few are the wayside flowers and far apart  
And are no sooner plucked than witherèd,  
When yearning heart is torn from yearning heart.  
A weary road it is,  
And yet far off I see clear waters start  
And clean sweet grass and tangled traceries  
Of whispering leaves, that laugh to see us come,  
And there one day . . . one day shall be our home.

The day will come. O dearest, do not doubt:  
It is not born as yet, but I shall see  
Some day the fearless sunrise flashing out  
And know the night will give you up to me.  
O heart, my heart, be glad,  
Because the time will come at last when we  
Shall leave all grief and unlearn all things sad  
And know the joy than which none sweeter is  
And I shall sing a happier song than this.

## SONG FOR AN UNWRITTEN PLAY

THE moon's a drowsy fool to-night,  
Wrapped in fleecy clouds and white;  
And all the while Endymion  
Sleeps on Latmos top alone.

Not a single star is seen:  
They are gathered round their queen,  
Keeping vigil by her bed,  
Patient and unwearied.

Now the poet drops his pen  
And moves about like other men:  
Tom o' Bedlam now is still  
And sleeps beneath the hawthorn'd hill.

Only the Latmian shepherd deems  
Something missing from his dreams  
And tosses as he sleeps alone.  
Alas, alas, Endymion!

## THE GRAY LAND

THE dear gray land above the dreaming river  
Smiles in my heart still. Would that I were  
there

To see the gray-leafed aspen shake and quiver  
And hear

The noise of rain the wind makes in the tree,  
To tramp the long salt marshes and to see  
The tide flood in and fill each bay and creek.  
The night comes very slowly, gently there,  
And slow, soft winds that play upon my cheek  
Call me their brother and I share  
The life of all still things that only seek  
Some part of light and necessary air  
That they may live at least and know no more  
Than placid life, unhurried by desire,  
The tall bleached thistles growing on the shore,  
The short spare grasses parched as if by fire.

There was a man who loved a wood so well,  
Each separate tree, each flower, each climbing  
weed,

That at the last he thither went to dwell  
And mix himself with all those quiet things.  
Then gradually left him thought and 'deed  
And dead were all his soul's imaginings.

So, day by day,

## THE GRAY LAND

All his own being gently flowed away  
And left him mixed indeed  
With flower and climbing weed,  
With them in summer green, in autumn gray.

So the gray country calls me till I go  
And make surrender of myself again;  
The misty hill, the leaden stream below  
Are waiting to receive me when I will.  
And if my stubborn heart and hands complain  
A slow wind moves upon the misty hill  
And whispers to me here of peace and rest,  
Of union with stone and grass and tree,  
Where being sleeps and is not curst or blest,  
Where hands can never feel and eyes not see,  
Where life and death alike are gray,  
In this gray land that sucks my life away.

## THE GOLDEN MOMENT

Along the branches of the laden tree

The ripe fruit smiling hang. The afternoon  
Is emptied of all things done and things to be.

Low in the sky the inconspicuous moon  
Stares enviously upon the mellow earth,  
That mocks her barren girth.

Ripe blackberries and long green trailing grass  
Are motionless beneath the heavy light:

The happy birds and creeping things that pass

Go fitfully and stir as if in fright,  
That they have broken on some mystery  
In bramble or in tree.

This is no hour for beings that are maiden;

The spring is virgin, lightly afraid and cold,  
But now the whole round earth is ripe and laden

And stirs beneath her coverlet of gold  
And in her agony a moment calls . . .

A heavy apple falls.

## NOW WOULD I BE

Now would I be in that removed place  
Where the dim sunlight hardly comes at all  
And branches of the young trees interlace  
And long swathes of the brambles twine and fall;  
A space between the hedgerow and a road  
Not trod by foot of any known to me,  
Where now and then a cart with scented load  
Goes sleepy down the lane with creaking axle-tree.

And there I'd lie upon the tumbled leaves,  
Watching a yard of the all else hidden sky,  
And make such songs a drowsy mind believes  
To be most perfect music. So would I  
Keep my face heavenwards and bless eternity,  
Wherein my heart could be as glad as this  
And lazily I'd bid all men come hither  
And in my dreams I'd tell them what they miss,  
Living in hate and work and all foul weather.

And still my happy dreams would go,  
Like children in a cowslip field  
Chasing rich-winged insects to and fro  
To see what rare delights they yield. . . .

. . . O I am tired of working to be cheated  
And sick of barriers that will not fall,



Of ancient prudent words too much repeated,  
And worn-out dreams that come not true at all.  
I know too well what things they are that ail me;  
    To fight is nothing, but to see  
Thus at the last my own hand fail me  
    Is agony.

O for that corner by the hummocked marshes,  
Visited hardly by the cynic sun,  
Where nothing clear and nothing bright or harsh  
    is,  
Where labour and the ache of it are done,  
Where naught is ended and where naught begun!

## THE VISION IN THE WOOD

THE husht September afternoon was sweet  
With rich and peaceful light. I could not hear  
On either side the sound of moving feet  
Although the hidden road was very near.  
The laden wood had powdered sun in it,  
Slipped through the leaves, a quiet messenger  
To tell me of the golden world outside  
Where fields of stubble stretched through counties  
wide.

And yet I did not move. My head reposed  
Upon a tuft of dry and scented grass  
And, with half-seeing eyes, through eyelids closed,  
I watched the languid chain of shadows pass,  
Light as the slowly moving shade imposed  
By summer clouds upon a sea of glass,  
And strove to banish or to make more clear  
The elusive and persistent dream of her.

And then I saw her, very dim at first,  
Peering for nuts amid the twisted boughs,  
Thought her some warm-haired dryad, lately burst  
Out of the chambers of her leafy house,  
Seeking for nuts for food and for her thirst  
Such water as the woodland stream allows,  
After the greedy summer has drunk up  
All but a drain within the mossy cup.

THE VISION IN THE WOOD 17

Then I, beholding her, was still a space  
And marked each posture as she moved or stood,  
Watching the sunlight on her hair and face.

Thus with calm folded hands and quiet blood  
I gazed until her counterfeited grace

Faded and left me lonely in the wood,  
Glad that the gods had given so much as this,  
To see her, if I might not have her kiss.

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Faded and left me lonely in the wood,  
Glad that the gods had given so much as this,  
To see her, if I might not have her kiss.

## ELEGIACS

### I

Roses and kisses alike we've known and enjoyed  
to the fullest:

Yesterday's roses are dead, those of next year  
are not born.

Autumn comes on apace. O take my head on your  
bosom,

Let us reason awhile between a kiss and a  
kiss.

All my body and soul are bent and bowed to your  
service;

Take my body and soul, give me your body and  
soul,

Trusty and anxious servants, bound the one to the  
other,

Seek not to set them apart, each has station in  
love.

Love me and understand me, sympathy give me  
and passion,

Give me a place in your mind, give me a place  
in your heart.

Long life lies before us, years of living together;

Reason is not enough; kiss me, beloved, again.

## II

Gorse and the curving grass and the sun-heavy air  
were around us:

All the world was asleep: you and I were awake.  
Slowly the children crept to rest in the shadowy  
bushes,

Slowly still the sun rose in the vacuous sky.  
Earth and air and our souls were faint in the heat  
of the noon-day;

Slower and yet more slow moved your hand in  
my hair.

Time stood still and the sun had checked his path  
in the azure;

Not a breath in the air ruffled the leaves of the  
bush.

Even our hearts were still and the restless swarm  
of our kisses

Paused and abandoned their flight, resting yet  
on our lips.

Still, as a man in a swoon sees heaven and earth  
laid before him,

Clearly I saw our love, binding and making us  
one.

## A RHYMELESS SONG

RHYME with its jingle still betrays  
The song that's meant for one alone.  
Dearest, I dedicate to you  
A little song without a rhyme.

The most unpractised schoolboy knows  
That quiet kisses are the sweetest.  
Safe locked within my arms you lie,  
Let not a single sound betray us.

Suppose your jealous mother came  
By chance this way and found us here . . .  
Be still, be still, and not a sound  
Shall give her warning that we love.



## WALKING AT NIGHT

*To A. G.*

THE moon poured down on tree and field,  
The leaf was silvered on the hedge,  
The sleeping kine were half revealed,  
Half shadowed at the pasture's edge.

By steep inclines and long descents,  
Amid the inattentive trees,  
You spoke of the four elements,  
The four eternal mysteries.

## SONG

SINCE love is mortal as man,  
Give good heed to your love,  
Lest a year be the length of its span  
Or a day or an hour be enough.

Watch it, for is it not fair?  
Shield it, for is it not flame?  
Look to it, so that it wear  
Ever and always the same.

Love dying is dead for good,  
Kisses cannot revive it.  
Look to it lest you should  
See love die and survive it.

## SONG

Who thinks that he possesses  
His mistress with his kisses  
Knows neither love nor her.  
Nor beauty is not his  
Who seeks it in a kiss:  
If you would seek for this  
O seek it elsewhere!

Love is a flame, a spirit<sup>1</sup>  
Beyond all earthly merit  
And all we dream of here;  
Strive as you may but still  
Love is intangible,  
No servant to your will  
But sovereign elsewhere.

## THE MORNING SUN

PERHAPS you sleep now, fifty miles to the south,  
While I sit here and dream of you by night.  
The thick soft blankets drawn about your mouth  
Have made for you a nest of warm delight;  
Your short crisp hair is thrown abroad and spilled  
Upon the pillow's whiteness and your eyes  
Are quiet and the round soft lids are filled  
With sleep.

But I shall watch until sunrise  
Creeps into chilly clouds and heavy air,  
Across the lands where you sleep and I wake,  
And I shall know the sun has seen you there,  
Unmoving though the winter morning break.  
Next, you will lift your hands and rub your eyes  
And turn to sleep again but wake and start  
And feel, half dreaming, with a dear surprise,  
My hand in the sunbeam touching at your heart.

## PERSUASION

STILL must your hands withhold your loveliness?  
Is your soul jealous of your body still?  
The fair white limbs beneath the clouding dress  
Are such hard forms as you alone could fill  
With life and sweetness. Such a harmony  
Is yours as music and the thought expressed  
By the musician: have no rivalry  
Between your soul and the shape in which it's drest.  
Kisses or words, both sensual, which shall be  
The burning symbol of the love we bear?  
My art is words, yours song, but still must we  
Be mute and songless, seeing how love is fair.  
Both our known arts being useless, we must turn  
To love himself, and his old practice learn.

## LOVE'S CLOSE

Now spring comes round again  
With blossom on the tree  
Dark blossom of the peach,  
Light blossom of the pear,  
And love-lorn birds complain  
And nesting birds prepare  
And love's keen fingers reach  
After the heart of me.

But now the blackthorn blows  
About the dusty lane  
And new buds peep and peer,  
I have no joy at all,  
For love draws near its close  
And love's white blossoms fall  
And in the springing year  
Love's fingers bring me pain.

## THE WEED

My mother told me this for true  
That there behind the mountains,  
That wear the mists about their feet  
And clouds about their summits,  
There grows the weed Forgetfulness,  
It grows there in the gullies.

If I but knew the way thereto,  
Three days long would I wander  
And pick a handful of the weed  
And drink it steeped in honey,  
That so I might forget your mouth  
A thousand times that kissed me.

## BALLAD

O BOY with thick and flowing hair,  
Why are your eyes so sad,  
Since spring is reigning in gardens and fields  
And all the birds are glad?  
O, go where the dear maidens are,  
Picking daisies, star on star,  
And leave your idle sorrow.

—No maiden's love can stay my grief,  
No kisses heal my wound,  
Because my life is a young plant  
With woodbine tendrils bound.  
A young girl's hands have hold of me  
And since she loves me tenderly  
My sorrow is not idle.

—Why, many a boy would give his hand  
To have such grief as this.  
How are you hurt by being loved  
Or wounded by a kiss?  
Now seek your love and carry her  
Where the long river grasses stir  
And hug and kiss in secret.

—Because her love is more than mine  
I can no more endure



Her lips upon my lips, her joy  
In a meeting-place secure.  
Flowers bloom, birds sing and she is glad  
But I am sorry, sick and sad,  
O, I am sick of loving.

—Then come with me, for I can give  
Love that is light and fleeting:  
I'll laugh in your embrace and crave  
No second time of meeting.  
My love's a breath, a song, a flower  
That lives and dies within the hour  
And does no hurt in dying.

## THE COMFORTABLE LOVER

SIGHS and love-glances  
Under dark trees,  
Witnessed by squirrels  
And sung by the breeze.

This be their bridal:  
Cuckoo for priest,  
Thrushes for choristers,  
Nuts for the feast.

Green, green the grass grows:  
My bed is white.  
Farewell, foolish lovers,  
I give you good-night.

## THE SEARCH

SINCE May is come, I go to seek  
My love by lane and road and street.  
There she is, there, ah, no, not she,  
Another clothed delusively.  
You people in the narrow roads,  
You know not how the May month goads  
Me to my love and our delight  
In brambled thickets out of sight.  
Stay not the youth who hurries by  
With wind-blown hair and anxious eye,  
For May is come and gone too fast:  
A fortnight even now is past.  
More precious moments must I spend,  
Searching the town from end to end?  
Scatter, make way, for I can see  
Her at a distance beckoning me.

## ENQUIRY

O THOU my belovèd,  
How art thou so fair  
From the rounded ankle  
To the crown of bright hair?  
O, how hast thou bound me  
Who fain would be free?  
What spells hast invented  
For capturing me?

The boughs on the river  
Hang drooping and low:  
We watch their green shadows  
Lie drowning below.  
O, fold round us, branches,  
From curious eyes,  
You leaves of the elder,  
A curtain devise.

Come round us so closely  
That no man may see  
In the shallow green channel  
My loved one and me:  
Then I will discover  
How she is so fair  
From the rounded ankle  
To the crown of bright hair.

## THE GREAT CHILD

I HEARD a young girl singing  
Under the summer sun:  
For burning love of a young man  
Her heart was all foredone.  
"This is my child and lover,  
My lover when he's strong,  
But when he's spent with loving  
My child the whole day long.

"I nurse him on my bosom,  
So dear a weight he is,  
And soothe his weary eyelids  
With a half-perceivèd kiss."  
And I saw in them together,  
Amid the grasses wild,  
The maiden with her lover,  
The mother with her child.

## APOLOGY

HAVE I slept and failed to hear you calling?  
Cry again, belov'd; for sleep is heavy,  
Curtaining away the golden sunlight,  
Shutting out the blue sky and the breezes,  
Sealing up my ears to all you tell me.  
Cry again; your voice shall pierce the clumsy  
Leaden folds that sleep has wrapt about me.  
Cry again! accomplish what the singing,  
Hours old now on all the trees and bushes,  
And the wind and sun could not accomplish.  
Lo! I waste good hours of love and kisses  
While the sun and you have spilt your glory  
Freely on me lying unregarding.  
In the happy islands, where no sunset  
Stains the waters with a morbid splendour,  
Where the open skies are blue for ever,  
I might stay for years and years unsleeping,  
Living for divinest conversation,  
Music, colour, scent and sense unceasing,  
Entering by eye and ear and nostril.  
Ah, but flesh is flesh and I am mortal!  
Cry again and do not leave me sleeping.

## HALF HOPE

AUGUST is gone and now this is September,  
Softer the sun in a cloudier sky;  
Yellow the leaves grow and apples grow golden,  
Blackberries ripen and hedges undress.  
Watch and you'll see the departure of summer,  
Here is the end, this the last month of all:  
Pause and look back and remember its promise,  
All that looked open and easy in May.

Nothing will stay them, the seasons go onward,  
Lightly the bright months fly out of my hand,  
Softly the leading note calls a new octave;  
Autumn is coming and what have I done?  
Even as summer my young days go over,  
No day to pause on and nowhere to rest:  
Slowly they go but implacably onwards,  
Ah! and my dreams, alas, still they are dreams.

How shall I force all my flowers to fruition,  
Use up the season of ripening sun?  
Softly the years go but going have vanished,  
Soon I shall find myself empty and old.  
Yet I feel in myself bright buds and blossoms,  
Promise of mellowest bearing to be.  
Still I have time beside what I have wasted:  
Life shall be good to me, work shall be sweet.

## A NIGHT PIECE

Now the gold-finch is sleeping in the oak-tree,  
Now at last the cuckoo falls to silence;  
In the thicket the nightingale is silent,  
Conning his love-song.

Only one bird slips across the darkness,  
Watch his long wings meet above in flying.  
Listen! . . . listen! . . . a whisper in the orchard . . .  
It is the night-jar.

Day has gone but the night has yet no jewels;  
Stillness, darkness weigh on us unwilling.  
See there, westwards, lo! a shining planet  
Hangs, unattended.



## RECOLLECTION

HAWTHORN above, as pale as frost,  
Against the paling sky is lost:  
On the pool's dark sheet below,  
The candid water-daisies glow.

As I came up and saw from far  
The water littered, star on star,  
I thought the may had left its hedge  
To float upon the pool's dark edge.

## COUNTRY GIRL'S COMPLAINT

WHEN hawthorn-trees were first in flower  
And great white clouds did pass,  
Upon a day, upon an hour,  
Upon a happy day  
My lover came this way  
And said, Come out and lie in grass,  
Come out and lie in grass.  
And so we lay and so we lay  
Long happy hours of burning day  
And kissed and were content,  
And still we could not go away  
Till all the light was spent.  
What happy hours we then did pass,  
Deep in the first long April grass!  
Ah, welladay!  
My love is gone away.  
And he has found another love,  
An upland village treasure-trove,  
And I must keep without an end  
The treasure that I cannot spend,  
That was for him alone.  
My life is done.

## SLEEPING HEROES

OLD Barbarossa  
Sleeps not alone  
With his beard flowing over  
The gray mossy stone.

Arthur is with him  
And Charlemain. The three  
Wait for awaking,  
Wait to be free.

When the raven calls them  
They'll rise all together  
And gird their three swords on  
And look at the weather.

Arthur will swear it is  
A very cold morning:  
Charlemain says a red sunrise  
Is the shepherd's warning.

Barbarossa says nothing  
But feels in every bone  
A pang of rheumatism  
From sleeping on wet stone.

## SLEEPING HEROES

Then from the gray heaven  
Comes a mist of faint rain  
And the three sleeping heroes  
Turn to sleep again.

## "HIGH GERMANY"

No more the English girls may go  
To follow with the drum,  
But still they flock together  
To see the soldiers come;  
For horse and foot are marching by  
And the bold artillery:  
They're going to the cruel wars  
In Low Germany.

They're marching down by lane and town  
And they are hot and dry,  
But as they marched together  
I heard the soldiers cry:  
"O all of us, both horse and foot  
And the proud artillery,  
We're going to the merry wars  
In Low Germany."

*August, 1914.*

## DRILLING IN RUSSELL SQUARE

THE withered leaves that drift in Russell Square  
Will turn to dust and mud and moulder there  
And we shall moulder in the plains of France  
Before these leaves have ceased from their last dance.

The hot sun triumphs through the fading trees,  
The fading houses keep away the breeze  
And the autumnal warmth strange dreams doth breed  
As right and left the faltering columns lead.

*Squad, 'shun! Form fours. . . .* And once the France  
we knew

Was a warm distant place with sun shot through,  
A happy land of gracious palaces,  
And Paris! Paris! where twice green the trees  
Do twice salute the all delightful year!

(Though the sun lives, the trees are dying here.)

And Germany we thought a singing place,  
Where in the hamlets dwelt a simple race,  
Where th'untaught villager would still compose  
Delicious things upon a girl or rose.

Well, I suppose all I shall see of France  
Will be most clouded by an Uhlan's lance,  
Red fields from cover glimpsed be all I see  
Of innocent, singing, peasant Germany.

*Form four-ers! Form two deep!* We wheel and pair  
And still the brown leaves drift in Russell Square.

# THE QUEEN OF CHINA: A POEM

*"How we spun  
A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun  
Of this familiar life."*

*To Naomi Royde-Smith*

## CHARACTERS

The KING

The PRINCE

The GENERAL

The CHAMBERLAIN

TWO ITALIAN TRAVELLERS

An OLD SCHOLAR

Three DOCTORS

A YOUNG COURTIER

TWO SENTRYES

The PRINCE'S SERVANT

The QUEEN

TWO SLAVE GIRLS

A GIRL'S VOICE

*Place.*—Various parts of the Royal Palace of China.

*Time.*—In the Fourteenth Century of the Christian Era.



## FIRST ACT

*Courtyard of the Royal Palace in the capital of China.*

*Enter the KING and the GENERAL.*

GENERAL: You are in haste, my lord?

KING: I still must haste

To catch the light before it flies from me,  
And now the council gathers. You are called:  
Will you not come?

GENERAL: I have despatches. Well?

KING:

To read in council?

GENERAL: Ours alone at first,  
Not to be judged on hastily or thrown  
Unthought on to the common ear, so grave,  
And yet so full of hope. . . . Of hope? Speak on;

KING:

I listen.

GENERAL: These are from the Tartar border  
Where now the wretched villages in flame  
Prophesy woe to come with smoky tongues.  
The foe is out,  
His army widely set and ravaging  
Our lands unshielded. Up and down the marches  
Our scanty soldiers move in desperate packs  
And hold their line with peril. And the army?

KING:

Are all our troops afoot?

GENERAL:

An hour ago

I set our messengers on every road.  
The governors are stirring to the work,  
My missives dropping in the waiting camps  
Inflame their hearts already. Have no fear  
Nor doubt success. We'll push them back again  
Until their host in ruin overtopples  
Like a young foolish horse that rears and falls,  
Crushing his rider under him. We'll have them  
down.

KING: Why, this is well.

GENERAL:

And yet not well enough.

For now we may with just excuse and much  
Indulgence of our purpose scald the sore  
That festers in our side. I'd raise an army,  
More than the border hath these twenty years  
Trembled beneath the tread of. Then their land  
Shall lie unfended from our blow and crouch  
And offer tribute as a recompense  
And be a province.

KING:

These are weary schemes

And bloody projects and we two are old.  
Speak you to younger soldiers—to my son.

GENERAL: Your son. . . .

KING:

You speak with such a heavy tongue

The two reluctant syllables, your mouth

Trembles, your eyes avoid my eyes—

GENERAL:

Your son. . . .

KING: My son's not whole, my son is heavy and  
sick.

I have observed him and you observing him;  
Often the same thoughts lay in our two brains,

By silence and by shame dissevered. Gladly  
I'd give an army to him for the toy  
That princely youth delights in.

GENERAL:

O dear Lord!

Will you not take the battle for an ease  
Of all your care in watching over him?

KING: I am too old

And age hath sucked my plenitude of desire;  
The vessels are dried up,  
Wherein the hot and maddening lymph resided  
That urges men to conquest. This will be  
A mighty war for glory and renown—  
You speak an ancient tongue, a dialect  
My lips have lost the use of. I have known  
Glory, the toy that young men die to purchase,  
But I've no relish in it, being old.  
If my son's blood were young as are his years. . . .

GENERAL: Wise huntsmen sometimes take an  
ailing hound

Out to the coursing-places that he knew  
And let him scent the quarry for a cure.

KING: Well like a huntsman spoken!

GENERAL:

He that knows

Nature of dog and horse is wise enough  
To govern continents.

KING:

Is this not he,

That slowly walks along the avenue?  
I'll try your skill in venery. Here he comes.

*The PRINCE enters*

PRINCE: I wish you happiness, dear father.

And I

KING:

Wish you more spirit and a cheerful look

To front the morning with.

GENERAL: Good prince, brave youth,  
Are you a youth indeed or older than we  
To be so listless?

PRINCE: I am sad, I own,  
And look not brightly out nor think not bravely.

KING: What ails you then?

PRINCE: Why, sir, I cannot tell  
What strange infection spreads along my veins  
And drowns in my heart. O, let me rest,  
For my disease hath touched the will of youth  
To be at work and, were my labour done  
In sixty heavy years, I could not be  
More weary or more out of love with life  
And lifeless in my love.

KING: Whom have you loved?

PRINCE: Only the world and what therein doth  
stand

I counted formerly, as lovers count  
Their mistresses' most delicate delights,  
But earth no longer pleases my dull eyes.  
It is my blood, dear father, old too soon,  
That duly not performs its proper task  
To feed the passions.

GENERAL: When you carried arms  
And sat your horse and led your troop, you looked  
not

So faintly mooded. You were strong of hand  
And sometimes I could see your parted lips  
Whisper a silent song to company you  
In time with the horse's gallop. We have ridden,  
Where the dim morning struggled with the mist  
On the wide plain, before the ranked army,

Galloping side by side and marshalling  
 The fiery soldiers. Ride again with me,  
 For there's adventure yet and troops to lead  
 And smoke and dust to breathe where men  
 contend.

PRINCE: I have forgotten all you speak of now.

KING: If arms could win my son from his  
 disease,

I'd make a war for medicine and reckon  
 The ravaged border but a blister set  
 To draw the kingdom's humours.

PRINCE:

Dear my lord,

King revered, father loved, and both obeyed  
 With all humility and all affection,  
 If I am slow in taking up the word  
 That now you cast to me, I have no fear.  
 I would not set one penny on my life  
 Nor take a step aside from waiting death:  
 But I am spiritless and ill at ease  
 And would not wear my mail or sit my horse.  
 I am sick, I am sick and will not touch the lance  
 Nor lift the sword nor set my foot in stirrup  
 But still with drooping head and unlit face  
 Go pacing on my ways about the court  
 And let the months run by uncounted still.

GENERAL: May the gods give you a more morn-  
 ing mood

And something better rising in your heart.  
 You were not so.

KING:

Nor I, when I was young.

GENERAL: No, by the gods! You were a hasty lad,  
 Save when a lady flouted you. Shame upon you,  
 Dear prince, to languish so without a cause!

50 THE QUEEN OF CHINA

No wound, no ailment nor no hurt of love  
 Can you advance in reason. You confess  
 That you have borne a thin and general love  
 To all creation and dispersed your heart  
 Unthriftilly on the world and thus you are sick  
 Of mere philosophy. Man, love your horse  
 And tend your arms and cherish one beside,  
 A lady, any lady, and be glad  
 A soldier wants so little to be glad.

PRINCE: I am no soldier, I!  
 I find no sweetness in the emulation  
 Of giving death or braving it.  
 Count me an emptied man, a youthful dotard,  
 Who totters down his early years and fades  
 Out of the bright-aired places that he knew,  
 Too dull to be regretful. So's my humour,  
 Still to be sad, still to be unaroused,  
 And let my passions rest or rot in peace.

GENERAL: But hear what's now on foot. A  
 moment yet!  
 You have not understood.

KING: We cannot move him.  
 I dreamt—we both were foolish. Let it pass  
 And let the years have sway. In his right season,  
 Fair unadornèd youth will scare these mists  
 And show himself with burning face arisen.  
 Over the astonished country ere we die.  
 I'll leave unstirred the waters of my grief:  
 These arguments are like the wands wherewith  
 Boys puddle in a stagnant pool and raise  
 Bubbles of nauseous air, from slime corrupted,  
 That chokes the heart with sickness. Did I linger  
 Too much on this or find it past all hope,

# THE QUEEN OF CHINA

51

The happiness that fills my flowing days  
Were poisoned at the root. O, plead no more!

*Enter the CHAMBERLAIN*

CHAMBERLAIN: Great king, the dragon-throne  
is set

And ringed with all your guards in golden mail.  
The reverend mandarins are crowding in  
And lose their several wisdoms in the crowd  
With pushings, stampings and revilings. Now  
The Queen is on her way.

KING: Come, my old friend;  
My son, your place, though dumb, is at my side.

PRINCE: My place in council suits well with my  
mind,  
For there the young are licensed to be dumb.

KING: Let us go in, old fellow. Youth refuses  
The high adventure we have offered it.  
There are no wars now, swords are out of fashion.

*They go in. Two SENTRIES take up their posts  
at the gate*

FIRST SENTRY: There are wars going. Did you  
hear their talk?

SECOND SENTRY: Hear less, say nothing. We are  
here on guard

Our eyes must be upon the gate, our tongues  
Behind our teeth.

FIRST SENTRY: Watch you yourself, my friend.  
Who are these in the gate?

SECOND SENTRY: Stand where you are;  
Strangers. No further step, until we know  
What men you be. This is the inner courtyard.

*The two TRAVELLERS enter*

FIRST TRAVELLER: We are known, good soldier,  
we are customed here:  
Let us but one step farther in to find  
Good friends and many.

SECOND SENTRY: We are not your friends,  
Nor have I ever seen a man like you  
With beard so thick, and baked brown face so  
long  
And such round staring eyes.

FIRST TRAVELLER: We are foreigners  
And yet not enemies.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Stand back, young fool,  
Whom half a month of half-learnt drill hath taught  
To tyrannise and threaten with the pike,  
That trembles in your clumsy fingers.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Still!  
Enough of quarrelling words. Good soldier, go  
And fetch the ancient Chamberlain, whom we  
knew.

His warrant will suffice to stamp us friendly  
And worthy of admission.

SECOND SENTRY: See that they do not pass you. I  
will go.

*He goes out*

FIRST SENTRY: I hardly know if you be men  
indeed,  
But I am not afraid . . . I wear a charm.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Your pike will do you better  
service. We  
Are men, not devils.

FIRST TRAVELLER: See, the Chamberlain



Approaches, almost hasting!

*The CHAMBERLAIN enters*

Do you know us?

Do our countenances in your memory hold  
Or hath not amity such preserving stuff  
To keep our pictures constant in your eyes?

CHAMBERLAIN: I know you not. . . . I know you!

Is it true?

You are here again, old friends?

FIRST TRAVELLER:

After long leagues

On camel-back across the bitter sands  
That are more salt than is the merciless sea  
And not so beautiful.

CHAMBERLAIN:

But you are here,  
New washed and cleanly clothed, with happy faces,  
Among your ancient though your alien friends.

SECOND TRAVELLER: We have come to you again,

I know not why,

For surely there is joy in Lombardy;  
The clear white wine is made there and the women  
Are also clear and white, and straight and tall,  
And the grey olives grow upon the hills  
In sunshine no less generous than this.  
But we have ridden on horses, mules and camels  
And crossed wide seas in many dangerous ships  
To be with you again.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Is there no news?

Or is the kingdom still as when we left it,  
Placid and sleepy and daily growing fat  
On the rich harvest of the river-mud?  
Have not the Tartars once come down like hail  
To rumple the silk skirts of your fair women

And slay your wise men in their libraries?

CHAMBERLAIN: You have gone and come again  
as to your home

After a day of absence. Still the river  
Leaves its deposit on the layered shore  
And there the corn and soft green rice-stalks grow  
Each year in greater plenty, maize and millet  
Choke up the fields and block the winding valleys  
In wealthiest abundance. Still the people  
Are placid, sleepy and have every day  
More than is time enough to sun themselves  
Outside the doorways of their light-built houses.  
All these things are the same. Go you about  
And look for what is changed in any street  
And you'll not find one house built or pulled down.

SECOND TRAVELLER: And the court?

CHAMBERLAIN:

The court

—aye, there a change might be,  
For peoples change not but a king grows old  
And alters love and chooses better friends  
To guide his counsel or delight his heart.  
The old king dies and burns his life away  
Daily like a glowing ember in a draught:  
The keen air of youth's passionate ideas  
Blows through his aged brain and fans it up  
Into consuming fire.

SECOND TRAVELLER: He is lunatic?  
Is that what you would say? An old man mad?  
Perhaps he has a new wife in his bed  
And wastes his scanty breath in loving her.

CHAMBERLAIN: He has taken a new wife into his  
house  
And yet his hands have not unloosed her girdle,

So much he holds her high in reverence.

FIRST TRAVELLER: A new queen wears the crown,  
the king's a lover!

And gone back fifty years in boyishness

Sickly to glance upon a maiden's zone!

On with your news; discourse!

CHAMBERLAIN:

O, beauty long

Has never lightened these dim walks and ways,

But now she dwells among us as a queen

And holds her court with us.

FIRST TRAVELLER:

The old king loves

This newly planted slip of beauty, this

Stranger unheard of by the men we knew?

CHAMBERLAIN: He loves her and she lives alone.

In the pavilion yonder by the lake,

And sleeps alone.

SECOND TRAVELLER: We come from countries

where men honestly

Lie if the need be but dress up no riddles

That cloak the truth and leave its heart unchanged.

Old chamberlain, your narrow, wrinkled eyes

Perplex me.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Peace! the manner of these  
strange men

Is to conceal. We grow too old, we two,

And too much versed in our wide-travelling

To cry this land up and that land down.

All peoples are bright butterflies to me,

Rejoicing me in variance. As well desire

That all the birds of the earth should sing one song

As that all men should show one face to us.

CHAMBERLAIN: Yet have I spoken truth. The  
king's new wife

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Is virgin still.

SECOND TRAVELLER: And you called her beauty's self?

Or is she some princess from lower China,  
As stiff and ugly as the treaty-seal  
Whose part she plays?

CHAMBERLAIN: She is most beautiful.  
And therefore the king mounts not her chaste bed,  
Because he dares not till she beckon him.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Is he become a dotard, straitly bound  
By an imaginary chain? O sorrow!  
That the great wise old king should stoop to beg  
A woman's kisses in senility.

CHAMBERLAIN: She is a slave,  
Her father's name and house alike unknown,  
Her limbs and life being subject to the law,  
To whipping, tearing, branding and the wheel  
If she should disobey. A distant Viceroy,  
Out of a city high among the mountains,  
Sent her, a chosen gift, to please the king,  
With fifty mounted men to be her guard.  
They rode around her sternly with drawn swords,  
She resting in their midst as easily  
As doth a slight flower in a fold of the rocks  
Where soil has gathered and birds dropped a seed.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Did she, on seeing, make her lord a slave?

CHAMBERLAIN: She gave the king a letter and stood mute  
With folded hands before the dragon-throne  
And quiet lips and all submissive eyes.  
But when he had read it and had gazed on her

He drew her to his side and on his seat  
And bade her rule his courtiers, which she does  
With words and glances, drawing reverence  
From bearded barons and old generals.  
Even the ribald young men of the court  
For whom to jest is such occasion now  
Hush their light tongues and gravely speak of her  
With worship.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Do you speak to us of her,  
Catalogue all her beauties and declare  
Her virtues to us.

CHAMBERLAIN: It was recently  
You called me old,  
Spoke of my narrow and my wrinkled eyes,  
Too narrow, too wrinkled to let beauty in,  
And age has withered up my lively tongue  
That cannot now discourse of lovely things.  
There are younger men than I to speak of her.

*A young COURTIER crosses the stage*

FIRST TRAVELLER (*approaching him*): Be done with  
those soft dreams your eyes betray,  
Young lord, and tell me what thing is the queen?  
COURTIER: She is an arrow flown against the  
wind. *He passes out*

SECOND TRAVELLER: The one's too cold to speak  
and all the rest  
Too hot for reason. She's a woman doubtless  
Who in the crowd of younger courtiers  
Will find a lover nearly to her choice  
And make the best of him. Till then she keeps  
The aged doddering king out of her bed

And by a feignèd mystery chains the court  
In worship of her.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But the king was wise  
And in his veins the blood ran still and true  
When last we sojourned here.

CHAMBERLAIN: The king is wise  
But now his wisdom is a fierier sort;  
Not the tame learning of sedentary sages  
But a fierce active knowledge that destroys  
And feeds upon the instrument it uses.  
He rises early, goes about his day  
With such quick zest and uncontrolled desire  
That the inmost chambers of the sacred house  
Hear now a sound till this unknown to them,  
Rustling of royal silks in haste that pass.

FIRST TRAVELLER: O marvellous transformation!  
The old grave king  
Who ruled his happy kingdom soberly,  
Surrounded by the gravest mandarins,  
That ever China knew! I am amazed.  
He will wear armour now and go to war,  
Waving his sword beneath the dragon-banner,  
And dream of conquest like an untaught boy.  
CHAMBERLAIN: Deem not the king is grown again  
a child.

He is most wise, I say, and all his passions  
Are governed by a fire beyond our sight.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Are you too fallen a slave  
to this strange girl?  
Behind the riddle of your changeless eyes  
I half see mysteries moving. We have known  
In our own land how courts are set aflame  
And princes maddened for a worthless woman,

And the old tales tell, which we hold for truth,  
How empires vaster than we now obey  
Hung in the fingers of an idle queen,  
Such power has beauty had in Italy.  
But here! You cluster round your river mud  
And tend the rice-crop, year on patient year,  
And the grave kings succeed eternally  
One to another in unbroken peace.  
What should you know of love and lust and war,  
Parricide, matricide and fratricide,  
Fire, rapine and the sheathless thirsty sword  
And all the ills that women bring on princes?  
I will not yet believe it.

FIRST TRAVELLER: How stands the prince  
In this new turmoil of the wildered court,  
Who when we last were here was next the throne,  
His father's chosen son?

CHAMBERLAIN: He is grown grave.  
Even as the king has waxed in youthfulness,  
So he in gravity and the look of years.  
You were his friends before but you'll be fortune'd  
If now he will exchange five words with you.

SECOND TRAVELLER: The court is surely mazed.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Changed at the heart.  
And yet the land as we came through it here  
Slept on its old and well-remembered sleep.  
The light junks glided on the yellow stream,  
The country, right and left, an endless field  
Of greening crops in tranquil busyness  
Lay like a sleepy hive. Your working people  
Stood quietly to their labour. Yet, in our absence,  
Time has been busy and remorseless change  
Fretting away the features of our love

And laying down strange shapes to meet our touch.  
 Even here the halls and gardens are the same:  
 I do remember that old climbing jasmin,  
 Whose gnarlèd roots start stiffly from the ground  
 In writhen nakedness but higher up  
 Burst in a boundless fountain of white flowers.  
 Here in this garden once with care you taught me  
 The secrets of your white-haired scientists,  
 Compass and printing-press and dreadful dust,  
 That being lit will blow great walls apart,  
 Secrets I carried back to see despised  
 In mine own native land, where yet they grow  
 —And now one secret you withhold from me.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Who is this man that walks  
 with blackened brow

And frowning purpose? Is it the general  
 That swept with purifying flame the hills  
 Which were infect with rebels?

CHAMBERLAIN: It is he.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Ask, ask of him!

*The GENERAL crosses the stage*

FIRST TRAVELLER: You were my friend when first  
 I visited  
 The court of China.

*The GENERAL stands and stares at him*

Tell, O, tell me now  
 Who is this queen, this mystery shrouded woman  
 Who captivates the king and wraps up all  
 In a close-meshèd veil of sorcery?  
 Tell me, I pray you, for you are a man  
 In the high summer of a human life,



Ripe yet not buried in the mound of years,  
Master of life, experienced in death,  
Having led armies and commanded men.

GENERAL: She is a trumpet blowing to distant wars.

FIRST TRAVELLER: You tell me nothing—or much.

GENERAL: No more—no more.

*He passes out*

SECOND TRAVELLER: Are they all mad?

CHAMBERLAIN: The court is breaking up  
And all are passing out.

SECOND TRAVELLER. Here comes the prince  
With chin reposing gravely on his breast  
And his still hands folded behind his back.  
I dare not speak to him.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But I will speak  
Because this mystery presses on my heart.  
He is yet young, he hath not thirty years:  
His icy posture is not natural  
Even in a young man of this strange land.  
Perhaps to see his ancient friends again  
Will melt his blood for any purposes.

*The PRINCE enters*

SECOND TRAVELLER: He is not the same as these  
are, for his face  
Is sorrowful. Here there's no mystery.  
I have not in this country seen a man  
Whose countenance was marked as this man's is,  
Showing what all they hide.

FIRST TRAVELLER:

Beloved lord!

The curves of cheek and breast and archèd foot,  
 Explain the eyes' soft splendour.

SECOND TRAVELLER: In our land,  
 Poets tell more than this and they set out  
 How she spreads wide her arms to take her lover,  
 And how her soft lips meet and answer his  
 Dumbly.

PRINCE: I said no single word of love,  
 But only that the queen's bright excellence  
 Is far beyond my praise. O, she is lovely  
 Even as a pearl new-taken from the sea:  
 She moves in radiance through the wildered court  
 And the gay silks that hide her sweetly flow  
 About the rhythmic motion of her easy limbs.  
 You know how we wake one morning here to find  
 Outside our opened windows the cherry-tree  
 Suddenly blooming. Our hearts are then amazed  
 And falter with the consciousness of beauty.

*He turns half away and is silent*

FIRST TRAVELLER (*softly*): She is so fair, my lord?

CHAMBERLAIN (*secretly*): He wears away  
 And perishes in contemplation  
 Of the bright queen. O woe, woe for China!

SECOND TRAVELLER (*secretly*): All is changed then,  
 if these men lose their masks  
 And in their narrow Oriental eyes  
 Love and fear show so plainly.

PRINCE: When she speaks,  
 Like the strange cadences of modal songs,  
 Her words at once perplex and charm the ear.

*He stops as if choked, and sways on his feet*

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SECOND TRAVELLER: Look to the prince! Quickly!  
The prince is falling!

CHAMBERLAIN: If with your foreign eyes you'd  
see the queen,  
She walks now in the garden to the lake;  
There you may see her, she in yellow silk.

*The TRAVELLERS run to the corner of the scene  
to watch*

*The PRINCE falls heavily in a swoon*

CHAMBERLAIN (*bending over him*): I cannot wake  
him, but he is not dead.  
Send for a doctor quickly!

FIRST TRAVELLER (*turning back*): Could you see  
her?

SECOND TRAVELLER: A moment. She's a girl  
that's well enough

But yellow as these Chinese women are,  
Though not so much as they. She did not smile  
But seriously went upon her way,  
Holding a fan. What did you see in her?

FIRST TRAVELLER: Nothing, for I am old and my  
weak eyes

Peered watering down the avenue and ached  
And could not yet descry her. I grow old  
And can see nothing.

CHAMBERLAIN: Bring a doctor quickly!  
The prince lies yet unstirring in his swoon:  
I cannot wake him!

*As the TRAVELLERS run to him and bend over  
the PRINCE, the Curtain falls*

## SECOND ACT

*The QUEEN's Pavilion in the gardens of the palace.  
The QUEEN is discovered before her mirror.*

QUEEN: Shall I put almond-blossom in my hair  
Or flowers of jasmin? Shall I tie it up  
With yellow silk or white? Ah, petty fool,  
What strange and small perplexities are these  
And womanish! to please a senseless thing,  
An unexpressed mirror, night by night,  
That nightly shows again my own poor praise  
And mocks me in reflexion.  
The almond blossoms best where God has sown it:  
Yonder beside the sleeping lake it stands,  
A bare tree misted over with faint flowers,  
And the wind gently taps a loose trail to and fro,  
Shaking the perfume free.  
How still the time is, yet the air's alive  
And all its separate particles aquiver  
Work madly on my senses and my veins  
Till my blood runs like the spilt quicksilver  
Upon the chemist's table, that not rests  
But smoothly courses on. O darling flowers!  
Is it the springtime moving in my body,  
The soft and piercing air that breathes on me,  
Is it the sight of young and tender grass  
Creeping across the lawn, that wakes in me

This sweet and poignant restlessness of will?  
The bright tints of the figured silks I wear,  
The soft-hued shadows lying in their folds,  
Where bird and beast and blossom, strangely  
worked

In golden threads and silver, are confounded  
And lie together in a shining dusk,  
These fair and gracious things, these gorgeous  
toys,

And the living emblems of the happy season  
Strike and afflict mine eyes with loveliness.  
Would that the day were done and darkness here!  
For I have watched through ten full hours of light,  
From the pale morning to this coloured time,  
And every minute stuffed with sights and sounds,  
Odours and shapes that stab the naked sense  
With too much beauty and too keen a joy;  
And still the long hours float upon their way,  
Large with contentment, rich with happiness,  
And in conclusion bring the night with them.  
Now the first shades are stealing on the earth  
And weariness upon my limbs and eyes:  
Already I can feel the darkness come  
With sweet relaxing smells and wider sounds,  
That are more gentle, and the gift of sleep. . . .

*Two SLAVE GIRLS enter*

What is your business here? I would be private.  
FIRST SLAVE GIRL: Suffer, O shining mistress,

that we braid  
With tender fingers your long lustrous hair  
And knot it in a crown upon your head.  
We have been taught by many years and whips

Our duty to a queen and where to place  
Deftly her jewels with experienced hands,  
How to arrange the falling folds of silk  
Upon her breast and how to tie her shoes  
And how to paint her lashes and her lips  
With carmine and dark bistre.  
We are long used in these things, we have learnt  
With tears and bruises and the steady flow  
Of our own warm blood running down our heels  
Under the strokes of the house-steward's lash  
To know our delicate business. Suffer then  
That we may wait on you and tend your beauty,  
That's worthy of skill so many tears have bought.

QUEEN: Ever at dusk two slave girls wait on me  
With speeches thus entreating in their mouths,  
Whom still I send away. Is there no end  
To all this store of slaves within the house?  
Are not the last yet come? I have no need  
Of tiring-maids to deck me. Mine own hands  
Are feat enough to drape my falling silks,  
To braid my hair and knot it.  
Mine own eyes and my mirror do suffice  
To judge where lies the jewel meetliest  
And where a blossom. Tell the steward this:  
A slave girl at my elbow wearies me,  
When most my heart desires to be alone.

SECOND SLAVE GIRL: Have pity on us, for we  
dare not, lady.

What use are we except to tend a queen  
And what man keeps the useless in his home  
Save with extremity of evil use?  
If you reject us, we go back again  
To curses and the bare, stiff whipping-post,

The anguished stripping off of our thin gowns,  
The cruel cord that's tied about our wrists  
And the whistling leather falling on our backs,  
Until our flesh vies with our smarting eyes  
And weeps red tears, as they weep free and clear,  
Both bitter salt.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: O mistress, be inclined,  
Most lovely lady, to look well on us.  
We will be mute when we shall wait on you  
And will no more disturb your lonely dreams  
Than the light porcelain upon your table  
Or the long pin that holds your heavy hair.  
We are but things that live to do you service  
And wait on beauty.

QUEEN: What advantage still  
Hope you in serving me? What liberty  
For idleness and wantonness and plays  
More full of freedom than your state allows?

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: Alas, but we are penned and  
prisoned now,  
Who are so young that every day seems long  
And yet is cruel swift in robbing us  
Of precious years wherefrom a joy is due.  
We should have pity from you, who can tell  
How freely pity should be given to youth,  
Licence our lovers freely to entertain,  
Where now a sour, hard steward shuts us up,  
Bolts close our doors, watches our lattices  
For sheets let down or candles set as signs  
To guide our pleasure.

QUEEN: And 'tis thus you'd use me?  
Make me a lucky darkness  
To hide your paramours?

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: O, you would feel  
Compassion for our state, for you are young  
And know how greedily time eats the years  
Of unused youth.

SECOND SLAVE GIRL (*secretly*): Too hot, too hot!  
Be cold!

You speak new words to her, she hath not loved.

QUEEN: You know this frenzy, then, which,  
poets tell,

Perplexes men and women, inflames their blood  
To fevers and blushing and their sensible tongues  
To utter foolish oaths? I have not loved.

My wits are quiet, I am not distraught,  
I reason unperturbed, my cheeks are cool,  
I sleep all night in peace, I do not wake  
Murmuring a name with tears.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: O, are you happy?

QUEEN: I have so smooth and delicate a life,  
I cannot tell. I live from day to day,  
So thrilling with a sweet and glad unease  
In expectation of to-morrow's gladness,  
That all my joy's part pain and want of rest.

SECOND SLAVE GIRL: But your delight, O lady,  
when it comes,

Does it stop up your pulses, seal your eyes  
Against the passage of the light-winged hours  
And fill your heart so that you lose all sense  
Of earth and being and the weight of time?  
For this is love and to find this we love.

QUEEN: My heart beats faster sometimes but not  
knocks

Against my side in hasty agony,  
Great heavy beats, prolonged and intervalled,



As they say lovers' do.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: But when our hearts  
Burst with a joy we cannot tell from pain,  
We know we love indeed.

QUEEN: But what is this?  
To hold debate upon a metaphysic,  
A very nothing, smoke of smoke, begotten  
By empty heat out of vacuity.  
You have too much tricked me with your idle tales:  
This is enough, begone. Your flesh is free,  
No stripes shall mark it, no blood stain it more  
For my ingratitude. Go now in peace;  
Who whips you, he himself shall know the lash,  
As the king loves me. Be my word your shield.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: Our skill is wasted; we are  
useless things.

SECOND SLAVE GIRL: Wasted and worse than  
useless, for the queen  
Hath shown offence at us.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: We have offended, we are  
miserable,  
Unfit to attend upon so bright a queen,  
And all our lore in beauty is quite lost.  
We will go hence and creep to hide in shame;  
We are worthy to be whipped and if the steward  
Dares not to flog us, we will whip each other  
And expiate with self-inflicted blows  
Our grave offences.

QUEEN: Peace, ye noisy children;  
The air is quiet, all the birds are hushed  
And you alone make echo my light walls  
With false complaint and crying.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL:

Look! O look!

The king is walking down the avenue  
 Wrapped in deep converse with two ancient men.  
 An almond-petal settles on his beard. . . .

SECOND SLAVE GIRL: Let us be gone. His frowning wrinkled face

That hath no kinship with our youthful cheeks  
 Makes me afraid. What would his anger be  
 If he should find us by the queen refused?  
 Let us escape him.

*The KING enters*

KING: Loud and loud and loud  
 Swell the light voices down the avenue  
 And greet me coming hither, as though I came  
 Into a covert full of springtime birds.

QUEEN: Ah me ungrateful! I have sent again  
 Your gifts away.

KING: Will you be lonely still  
 And still reject the emblems of a queen?  
 Let it be as you wish. You shall be pleased,  
 If that all I can give be not to give.  
 Get you hence, children.

*The SLAVE GIRLS go out*

This is my hour of colloquy with you,  
 Most sweet refreshment when the day is done.

QUEEN: I am your slave.

KING: So still you say,  
 Which in another I should deem humility  
 Put on for mocking, but your heart is true.  
 Happy am I to have so fair a slave,  
 So wise a servant, whom another king  
 Would not dare call his queen or come to her

Save with gifts loaded, pain expecting eyes  
And heart bowed down for tyranny and stripes.  
This day is done,  
One of my last, for I draw on in age  
And there is nothing that is left of it,  
Save traces of the sun about the air,  
Unless you approve my deeds and give them savour  
With good words and sweet nodding of the head.  
Listen! The governor of the Mountain Province,  
Who spoiled a poor man's patch of hard-raised  
millet  
For private vengeance, is cast down and shamed.  
To-day I judged him in the attentive court,  
Took all his honours from him, turned him off,  
Free and disgraced.

QUEEN: O, that was kingly done!

KING: Now he shall earn his bread and know  
how evil

It is to lose a treasure hardly earned.

QUEEN: O, it is evil to be robbed of all,  
Stripped, beaten down. The poor must still be sad;  
They lose so much because they have so little,  
And the thin meal, that would disgust our  
stomachs,

Is doubly bitter set upon their tables,  
Seasoned with doubt and sauced with aching fear.  
Tell me, the harbour-master of the port,  
Who thieved from the poor fishermen half their  
catch,

When they brought their salt vessels to his piers,  
How has he fared to-day? I much misliked  
The stout and prosperous seeming of his face  
Against the pinched and pitiful regard

Of his accusers. He were guilty enough  
To have ruled so fatly over men so thin.

KING: I had a paper from the governor  
Which weightily set forth his services,  
How he has been a lion in our part  
To put down smugglers, how he gave the alarm,  
Five years gone, when the Indian fleet approached,  
Threatening the harbour.

QUEEN: And for this you spared him?

**KING** *nods*

QUEEN: What services can outweigh his injustice?

O my dear lord, if he had asked a guerdon  
For these his deeds and you had granted it,  
When he proceeded: Give me leave to pill  
And rob the king's poor subjects, you'd have  
answered—

What would you have said, my lord? O, it is shame  
That thus the poor can sweat and suffer still,  
Even when the ruler is so wise a man  
And my heart sickens when I think of all  
The scattered kingdoms of the unhappy earth  
Where cruel men and careless boys are crowned.

KING (*after a moment's silence*): You are just,  
And in the heat and hurry of your youth  
You follow still unswayed the difficult path  
Which an old king's feet cannot keep for long  
Without your guidance. I will put him down,  
As you commanded me. I am ashamed.  
I will put him down; there shall be an end of him.  
Yet do not think that I to pleasure you  
Do justice on my subjects. You have shown me

How glad a thing is justice and how glad  
A king's heart is in judging righteously.  
I would not that the good deeds of your hand  
Should be the like of any concubine's  
Boons begged at midnight in the shameful bed.

QUEEN: They will not say so, who have known  
your virtue.

You have given me your riches and your love  
And I am happy in the much I have.  
It is enough for me and I will study  
How to repay you with the scanty gifts  
That are my own indeed. I will not steal  
Any least shred of your benevolent deeds  
To deck my queenship with.

KING: But all is yours  
And I am yours and you are grown my life,  
A new blood beating in my ancient pulse.  
For there are voices speaking in young blood,  
Which an old heart no longer hears. They tell  
Of truth and justice and brave work to do.  
I do remember when they were my own;  
It is long since. . . .

*He stands musing*

I bring you here a gift,  
Strange and of value to the curious mind,  
Two travellers from the unimagined West,  
Who were my guests once and who loved me well,  
Which love has brought them hither once again  
A perilous journey through the springless waste.  
They were my friends and they are very wise,  
They have large learning and a store of tales  
Fit to delight a queen.

QUEEN: ' It shall be joy  
 Enough to welcome them if they have loved you.  
 KING (*going to the door*): They rest their bodies  
 on a green soft bank  
 And breathe in quietly the excellent air.  
 What peace and knowledge rest within their eyes!  
 The calm sweet memory of a coloured life  
 Shines in the stirless lids. O, they are happy,  
 Who are not weary save with labour done  
 And toil accomplished. So may I rest some day  
 But the end approaches and the goal not yet.  
 Come, friends. The queen invites you; you may  
 come.

*The TRAVELLERS enter*

FIRST TRAVELLER: The love and reverence we  
 bore the king  
 Is now not halved but doubled for your sake.  
 Take then our love, O lady, and our prayers  
 That China still may prosper in your rule.

SECOND TRAVELLER: We are two travellers, whose  
 way has been  
 Cast in the deserts where no beauty is.  
 Now a strange gladness falls upon our hearts  
 Merely to see you.

QUEEN: You have loved my lord  
 And I accept your love. Halve it or double,  
 The whole shall go to him; I could not stay  
 So good a gift from him. Rise, travellers,  
 For I am hungry for the tales you know.

FIRST TRAVELLER: O, we have come a long and  
 weary way,  
 Past all your fancy, lower than your dreams,

Through many dangers but most tedious  
For you to hear of. Will a list set out  
Of all the deserts we have suffered in  
Take and rejoice your ears with entertainment,  
Gobi and Shamo and the salten waste  
Beyond Bokhara and the lonely marshes  
That lie beside the desolate Caspian?  
We went on weary feet, bestrode strange beasts,  
Were passengers in foul and evil ships  
And we are here. We stayed with many kings,  
Splendid or barbarous, smooth-tongued or rough;  
In hovels and in palaces alike  
We lay awake all night in sweating fear  
To feel the treacherous blade that severs throats  
Of innocent sleeping men and no word said.  
Once in Stamboul we saw a lady die,  
A lovely lady who had done no hurt,  
Trussed in a sacking like a market-beast  
And flung to drown, when dawn with splendour  
gilt  
The bitter choking waters of her death,  
Because she loved. And once in Samarcand,  
The fabled town, we saw a beggar throned,  
Who set the crown upon his greasy head  
And gave the law out in a villain's voice  
To silken lords, who stooped and kissed his foot,  
And in Thibeth we saw the monasteries,  
Where the Grand Lama rules his drowsy monks,  
Who waste the day with turning of a wheel,  
That serves instead of grace and gracious deeds.  
How ticklish and alive is memory!  
Stir but the brain and the pot boils and bubbles  
And steams out pictures of the endless road,

How here we went a day through lofty tops  
By tracks and mountain-paths that scare the sense  
And over smooth, unfriendly fields of ice  
And jutting shelves and cornices of snow  
That trembled as we trod, the while the wind  
Curling round graven buttresses of rock  
Played like an icy lightning in the air  
And froze our purposes; and how we came  
Heavily at the end of the afternoon  
Over long slopes of short and bitten grass  
On to the shoulder of a blowing hill  
And saw the dreaming country spread beneath  
Under the faint mist and the falling sun  
Wrapt in a magic peace. There we have stood  
And let our burdens drop and breathed again  
The wreathing sweetness of the valley air  
That rises warmly from frequented fields  
To cheer the naked hills. O, we have stood  
Silent and felt a singing in our hearts  
To see how patient, careful man has made  
A garden of his earth.  
Here we went sweating up a narrow, stony  
Root-cumbered lane between low-arching trees  
In crushing darkness that could not conceal  
The steepness of the wooded mountain-side  
And there we halted in a shallow glade,  
Whose marshy middle the blue gentian decked,  
And slept uneasily and woke at dawn  
With fever fretting softly at our bones.  
These are the ornaments of voyagers,  
This hand a camel crushed in Turkestan,  
This limping heel a Tartar's arrow struck,  
This bended back with ague hath been doubled



All a long night amid the Volga's reeds;  
But these mine eyes are bright for having seen  
Death and escape, murder and treachery  
And sunrise in the mists of the high hills.  
O, in the wide waste world there's much to see  
For those who'll buy with danger!  
Wonders lie thick as in a raree-show  
And the showman is old Death. But we have seen,  
Between the wide and the shuttered gates of day  
And in the long, slow hours of perilous night,  
'Twixt Tuscany where too the cherry blows  
And your bright country, no town made for rest,  
No vale that tempted us to lie in it,  
Though dusty were our heads and torn our feet  
With the long journey.

KING:                                So his epic's done  
But briefly, though the end of it be good.  
QUEEN: Old travellers, you are most fortunate,  
You have purchased wonders wisely. . . .  
I would see other lands and learn how there  
The spring arises, how the blossoms grow  
Mantling in beauty round the standing trees,  
And burn away at last at summer's touch,  
Leaving the naked fruit behind. I'd learn  
If all men there are happy, ploughing, sowing  
Or working stooped among the golden ears  
Or taking the sweet apples from the boughs  
And laying them by rows in country lofts  
Or striding through the keen winds of the sea.  
I have a great wish to go far to-day:  
My body moves and turns within my silks,  
Restlessness and I know not what of fear  
Devour me.

KING: The sap mounting in the trees  
 Draws your blood with it, for your blood's like sap,  
 That goes to feed the topmost flowering bough.

QUEEN: There is something in me stirring like  
 the sap,

A new sharp ache, a pain I would not lose.  
 O, if I were a man, I'd take a horse  
 And ride all night with stars to be my guide  
 And echo for a groom to follow after.  
 I'd ride all night until the mountains stood  
 Patient beneath the flying hooves, and on,  
 Along the causeway through the low, rich lands,  
 High built and sure, beneath a young May moon  
 Hung in the heavens, like a new-born moth,  
 That only now unfolds her velvet wings,  
 And ride still on and reach the palace gates,  
 Weary and sated and prepared for rest,  
 When peasants go out yawning to their fields.  
 What is this racing madly in my veins?  
 My eyes hurt me, my breasts hurt me and my  
 hands

For thought of all the loveliness I see.

FIRST TRAVELLER: It is the spring, dear queen.

SECOND TRAVELLER (*unheard*): Perhaps—the  
 spring!

QUEEN: Call me my groom, my lord, and bid  
 him saddle

My too long stabled horse. Ah, he and I  
 Alike have suffered in captivity  
 Where generous spirits turn to acid sour.  
 Will you call him, my lord, will you allow me  
 To ride abroad—to-night—unguarded?

KING:

Ah!

# THE QUEEN OF CHINA

81

What would you? But I will not stay your wish  
Nor linger in fulfilment.

QUEEN: Take no heed:  
I am foolish and the empty breath of folly  
Fades in intent as mist on winter days  
Blown from the mouth.

KING: What would you?

QUEEN: Nothing now,  
Save to be rested, to lose count of time  
And have in peace dominion of my senses.

KING: The young have growing pains, which we  
forget,  
But which we'd feel again were't possible.

*The CHAMBERLAIN enters and throws himself  
at the KING's feet*

CHAMBERLAIN: Supreme Magnificence of High-  
est Heaven!

Your son—

QUEEN: The prince—

KING: My son?

CHAMBERLAIN: My lord, he lies  
These eight hours in a still and deathly swoon,  
Breathing, not sentient. All the doctor's art  
Avails not on his body, and he lies  
Under the yellow hangings of his bed  
With pinched and bloodless face. His creeping  
pulse

So dimly moves, with such faint finger marks  
The passage of his life that scarce the blood  
Runs through his slackened limbs. Three doctors  
watch him,  
Equally bowed with science and many years,

Who can do nothing. Still the swoon goes on.

QUEEN: O!

SECOND TRAVELLER (*unheard*): Mark the queen!

KING:

He is my best-loved son,

And losing him—

FIRST TRAVELLER: My lord, we saw him fall  
And guessed not that his sickness was so heavy,  
We were even speaking with him.

QUEEN:

Go to him

Quickly and take these learned men to him.

O, surely in the desert you have found

Strange herbs and charms our books are ignorant  
of

And such may save him.

FIRST TRAVELLER:

All the skill we have,

All drugs that now do fill our satchels, shall

With our good will attend on his disease

And we'll contrive his health.

QUEEN:

Then go, my lord,

For in such swoons the soul irresolute stands

In the mouth and nostrils, in the doors and portals

Of the warm comfortable body, loth

To leave her fashioned home yet pressed to go,

But will not if the right cure be but found.

Go to him quickly.

*The Curtain falls*

## THIRD ACT

### SCENE ONE

*The PRINCE'S chamber, with dimly burning lamps.  
The PRINCE lies motionless in a bed which is hung  
with yellow. Three old DOCTORS stand watching  
him.*

FIRST DOCTOR: In my last medicine, in my final  
charm,

There was no succour. All my essences  
A thousand times distilled by cunning slaves  
And filtered and refined till every drop  
Burns and is bright with the residing power,  
All these administered have no effect  
Upon his magic and unnatural sleep.

SECOND DOCTOR: Still the pulse changes not.

THIRD DOCTOR: When you can feel it,  
It beats at the same slow unveering rate,  
Such speed as scarce will keep a snake alive,  
The slowest breathing of all blooded things.

SECOND DOCTOR: Should we try toads' lungs  
boiled with cinnamon  
And made into a plaster for the breast?  
When I was young and daily sought the schools,  
Quick rumour said a mighty doctor there,  
One of my masters, saved a child with it,  
Who lay a week in such a swoon as this,

Though he denied it.

THIRD DOCTOR: Ah, my amulet!  
It should have saved him, if I had it now.  
It came to me from old Confucius' time  
And drove the strongest evils from their seat.  
A patient stole it.

FIRST DOCTOR: See him lying there!  
Sweet sirops and the sticky juice of fruits,  
Fine juice of herbs and the medicinal earths,  
Gum arabick compounded with pomegranates,  
And sifted dust of powdered chrysoprase,  
All I have used and still the trance unshaken  
Laughs at my sweating pains.

THIRD DOCTOR: It is a devil,  
Which with burnt paper and with holy words  
We must expel from him.

SECOND DOCTOR: It is a worm,  
Which lodges in a passage of the brain  
And there impedes its working.

FIRST DOCTOR: None of these:  
If it had been disease or worm or devil,  
It should have yielded up to me ere this.  
It is no sickness I was taught to meet,  
My masters knew not of it.

THIRD DOCTOR: Nor mine either.

SECOND DOCTOR: God grant it may not be the  
plague again  
Come in another shape and deadlier  
As it is wont to do.

FIRST DOCTOR: The plague!

THIRD DOCTOR: The plague!

FIRST DOCTOR: Put not this shape of evil in our  
eyes

Which now must float between the light and us  
 And haunt us. If this thing be true indeed,  
 We three are doomed to die a dreadful death,  
 With swelling in our loins and sweating blood  
 And swollen tongues that stop the dying speech.  
 When I was young, long ere you two were born,  
 I saw the plague come down on us. It rose  
 Out of the northward desert, where no man is  
 And smote our borders. Then the people lay  
 Groaning in heaps beside their stinking houses;  
 For when a woman perished in a house  
 Her husband would not come to bury her  
 But stayed upon the threshold and there died.  
 Sons brought not water to their sinking fathers;  
 In the ungarnished house of government  
 Rotted unhelped the tainted mandarins.  
 All, all! it seemed—my father and my mother!  
 And there, a child, I straitly vowed my life  
 To healing and the tending of men's bodies;  
 All labour spent in vain, for now a cause  
 Arises needing my most delicate skill  
 And finds me wanting. O, I am ashamed!

SECOND DOCTOR: No man continues long in this  
 ill posture;

If the prince wake not now, he dies.

THIRD DOCTOR:

And we?

FIRST DOCTOR: I fear the old king in his grief.

And I

SECOND DOCTOR:

Fear for the king. Have you not noticed him,  
 How he is changed, how all his looks and customs  
 Are dangerously altered from their wont?  
 I have distinguished in him many signs  
 Of ominous reading. In his age he lives

As though his body were grown young again  
And his dry veins were flushed with youthful blood  
To wash out the old channels, long disused,  
Of vehemence and royal energy.  
Our honoured scientists have set it down,  
Living a long time closeted with books,  
In solitude to water budding thought,  
How these things token dangerous maladies  
And slow diseases that assail the brain.  
He grows as mad as those that waste in prison,  
Tearing the straw behind the pitiless bars,  
And did no sceptre nor no royal robes  
Assure him from their fate, he'd lie with them.

FIRST DOCTOR: The queen has touched the  
springs of youth in him,  
Renewed his wasting sinews, made more supple  
His hardening arteries  
And breathed a new and an amazing strength  
Into his nostrils and his panting lungs.

SECOND DOCTOR: She is a woman visibly un-  
sound,  
Whose passion for defending of the weak  
And febrile love of colours and bright flowers  
Proclaim her tainted and degenerate.  
The prince himself, who lies there hardly breath-  
ing,

Is plainly epileptic, and his case,  
Though past the bounds of any practical skill,  
Is not beyond the grasp of theory.  
We doctors know by reading of much print  
What flaws and faults to find in royal houses.

THIRD DOCTOR: Softly! The king comes and a  
train with him.



SECOND DOCTOR: Stand round the prince and take his pulse again.

*The DOCTORS go to the bedside and the FIRST DOCTOR takes the PRINCE'S wrist. The KING enters, followed by the TRAVELLERS and the CHAMBERLAIN*

FIRST DOCTOR (*solemnly*): His blood goes slowly as a hill-fed river

In deepest winter when no snow doth melt.

KING: Put up your drugs, put up your instruments,

O men of little worth! Is it for this

The state has taught you and has nourished you  
So many years till your long beards are grey?

FIRST DOCTOR (*bowing*): Slay us, O mighty monarch, but delay

Our death a little, for these foreigners

Will surely heal the prince and we'd observe

The unsuspected cure. Why, it is true

That we are men of base and little worth;

But grant us this, the last request we make,

For we are famished even now for knowledge.

Grant it, great lord; we would learn one thing more

Before we die.

SECOND DOCTOR (*bowing*): There is no end to learning

And even in the doorway of the grave,

A man may turn his head to read one line

Before departing.

THIRD DOCTOR (*bowing*): Let us not go down  
To ignorant death and lie unlearned corpses.

For surely still our curious ghosts would walk,  
With pens and tablets in their shadowy hands,  
To learn this one thing more.

KING: Be silent, men  
Of vanity and flatulent, swollen science,  
Whom but to hear is to abhor. Begone!

SECOND DOCTOR (*secretly*): Thank God for it.

FIRST DOCTOR: We will depart, my lord.

*The three DOCTORS bow deeply and go out*

KING: Go to him, friends. My only hope's in you.

FIRST TRAVELLER: I have looked at him, tested  
his pulse and heart,  
Lifted his lids and looked upon his eyes,  
And hearkened his scant breath, but there's no salve  
That ever I have heard of would revive him.  
This is a sickness that is strange to me,  
And I've seen many men die many deaths,  
Scurvy and leprosy and the damp ague  
That breaks the bones with its strong shivering.  
But this is none of these.

KING: He is alive,  
They tell me, though his sleep resembles death.  
Is there no man can help him and help me?  
The new-born power, so gracious in my hands,  
Runs through my fingers now like falling water.  
And I am helpless. Why, a king can kill  
With any sort of death, but when he stands  
At the sad bedside of his dying son,  
He is as powerless as another man.

CHAMBERLAIN: O woe, woe, woe on China! Now  
is all

The fabric of the high-arched kingdom gone  
And the fair provinces, the Mountain Province,  
The Province of the Plain, the River Province,  
The Border Countries and the teeming port  
And cities where the wise old Viceroy's rule,  
Shaking their honoured governmental heads,  
All these are wounded. O, he is a prince  
That is a paragon of youthful virtues  
And is fulfilled of unexampled good!

KING: Had I not kingly state and governance,  
I'd rave as he does.

CHAMBERLAIN: Is there nought indeed?  
Can you not save him?

FIRST TRAVELLER: He's in the hands of God.  
And hangs suspended by a viewless chain  
High out of our perception.

CHAMBERLAIN: I've a plan,  
If but the king will hear me.

KING: Speak, old servant.

CHAMBERLAIN: With these poor doctors we've  
not used up yet

The treasures of the wisdom of the realm.  
In a corner of the royal library,  
Hidden by books heaped like a monument,  
Sits an old sage, old beyond reckoning,  
To whom I am a child. He studies there  
And studied there when you and I were young,  
Distilling all the toil of his long life,  
All honey gathered from his dusty flowers,  
To make one page in the great dictionary.  
Who knows what he has found in such a time,  
Strange remedies in unaccustomed script  
And charms by us forgotten?



Who is the murderer?

OLD SCHOLAR: No murder this!

Full well I know how mind can shatter mind  
With airy weight and blows. You walk your ways,  
Slaying in blindest ignorance with a thought  
And maiming with desires. O foolish men!  
Who are most like to children armed with daggers  
Or playing with huge poisons. Learn of my  
wisdom,

Poor wisdom! that still makes a crutch for fools  
And may not walk alone. I bid you now  
Seek out the prince's servants and his friends,  
All that are daily round him, all that touch  
His life materially with passing hands  
Or with the frailest woven web of thought.  
Then let them walk beside him as he lies  
And touch him, each one gently on the brow;  
The right man's touch will call him back to life.  
Let what I bid be done. Farewell!

*He goes out*

CHAMBERLAIN: He is gone!

KING: Let what he bids be done. It is a chance  
Built up too high and slender in the fancy  
To bear the weight of any useful hope,  
Yet we will try it.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Call the prince's servants!

KING: Stay!

CHAMBERLAIN: Ah, my lord—

KING: I faint, my will gives way,  
I cannot see it. O, put off the test.  
Hope grows, a wretched seedling in my heart,  
With pale and sapless leaves and drooping stem;

Let me a moment nourish it. Let me—

SECOND TRAVELLER: Hold him, he shakes—

FIRST TRAVELLER: Your hand behind his  
shoulders,

So!—

KING: I am better. Look not thus with fear  
On age's and on grief's infirmity.

Give me a moment. I can breathe again.

O, how it caught my heart.

FIRST TRAVELLER: We'll lead you hence  
Into your own apartments and with you  
Await the outcome of the trial.

KING: No!

I will not go so far, I'll stay with him  
And sooner learn if there be any hope.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Wait till the morning's light

KING: I could not sleep  
And could not watch all night and nothing done.  
Give me a moment. I am better now.

The thing shall now be done.

CHAMBERLAIN: We'll draw the curtain  
That shuts the alcove off. You shall not see  
The long procession going by and by  
Or watch with sick hope and o'erstrained heart  
Each hand raised up to touch him.

*He draws a curtain hiding the bed*

I will go  
And set the train in motion. As the first  
Go by his bed, I'll marshal up the rest  
And send swift messengers about the city  
To fetch his noble friends.

*He goes out*

SECOND TRAVELLER: We'll not despair,  
While anything is doing. Sit, my lord;  
Shall we with coloured travellers' tales beguile you?

KING: To-day I have been happy as a youth  
For all the toils of kingship had grown light  
And turned to toys which I manipulated  
With easy fingers. Now here is a woe  
Beyond the great new wisdom I have learnt.  
It passes me: I am too old a man.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But not so old as I nor yet so  
worn  
With dangers.

KING: Surely that step was the first!  
There goes another and another now.

*The CHAMBERLAIN comes in*

CHAMBERLAIN: I have set the court in motion  
now and all  
Pass in an anxious stream beside the bed  
For any commoner may have the touch  
Of curing sickness, formerly reserved  
For kings alone.

KING: Stay with us now, old friend.  
I need all my old friends now.

FIRST TRAVELLER: We are here.

KING: I'll not forget it.

CHAMBERLAIN (*after a pause*): Still the train goes  
on,  
Guards, waiting-maids, the servants of the bath,  
Gardeners, grooms and all the varletry  
That fills the court.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But still as it goes on  
Hope lingers. Till the last poor slave has been

Let me a moment nourish it. Let me—

SECOND TRAVELLER: Hold him, he shakes—

FIRST TRAVELLER: Your hand behind his  
shoulders,

So!—

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On age's and on grief's infirmity.

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Guards, waiting-maids, the servants of the bath,  
Gardeners, grooms and all the varletry  
That fills the court.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But still as it goes on  
Hope lingers. Till the last poor slave has been

We'll not despair of him.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Still they go on  
And still I hear the sound of those to come.

*The Curtain falls*

## SCENE TWO

*The same, not long before the dawn, with the curtain still hiding the PRINCE'S bed. The KING, the two TRAVELLERS and the CHAMBERLAIN sit round a small brazier, in which charcoal is burning.*

SECOND TRAVELLER: How all night long my flesh  
has crawled to hear

The shuffling and the laughter going by,  
The steady tramp of the insensate feet  
Of the poor slaves, who came to try their touch  
And in mechanical procession tread  
Our last and fading hopes to dust.  
How they have laughed and nudged and clasped  
at hands

And pulled at garments and gone breathless by,  
The idiots, to whom anything that's strange  
Makes an occasion for a holiday.

What cookmaid was it that went by just now,  
With greasy clothes and breath of very kitchen  
And harsh loud piercing whisper, out of sight?  
Was she the last to go?

FIRST TRAVELLER: The last has gone  
Two hours back in the dead and depth of night.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Two hours gone! but a  
sound—just here—just now—

Under my head, in the very gate of my ear,  
That hath stood strained all night—  
The last wave of that hideous flowing tide  
That beat in loud succession on the shore,  
What was the sound, friend, tell me—

FIRST TRAVELLER:                      You have slept  
More than two hours and we have watched alone,  
The Chamberlain and I, in misery,  
Warming our hands above this charcoal fire,  
Stretching our palms out to the flameless glow,  
Of use and custom, not for comfort's sake.  
Awake and share our vigil; we have dreamt  
The long night through with still unclosing eyes,  
While the dark skies encompassed us around  
With walls of blackness that closed in on us  
*And choked our breath.* We dreamt in solitude  
Of endless evil striking like a sword  
Upon the land of fertile happiness,  
Of sickness eating, like a minute worm,  
The fruit's sweet centre.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Is the king asleep?

CHAMBERLAIN: His eyes are closed, his head has  
fallen back,  
His hands rest still upon the chair's curved arms,  
His body lies relaxed—he is asleep.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Hush, hush! He does not sleep, but his great age  
Makes nature kindly to his brain. He lies  
Wrapt in a stupor of the o'erwrought soul,  
Which now is drugged from pain by pain itself.  
Thus sorrow floods out sorrow and the evil  
Defeats its own damned armies.

KING: It is gone,

That weary caravan of dwindling hope.

FIRST TRAVELLER: The night is not yet gone and  
you are weary.

Lay back your head upon the pillow there  
And sleep awhile.

KING: O, I am fain of sleep.

*He lies back again and sleeps*

SECOND TRAVELLER: What's to be done now?

FIRST TRAVELLER: Let the dead king sleep,  
Beside his son that is alive in death,  
For there is nothing left. All stratagems,  
Devices and procurings of the wise  
Are shown as empty and as useless things,  
As dances of the desert dervish-doctors,  
Who mock the sick with leaps and attitudes,  
Which we have mocked at. There is nothing left,  
Save to expect the coming of the day  
And ruin with it.

CHAMBERLAIN: Still the day comes on;  
The fountain now stands out all silvery clear,  
That through the sad hours beat upon my brain  
With dull recurrence of its falling drops.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Did you not say the land  
slept on unchanged?

CHAMBERLAIN: All was the same—and still the  
country sleeps

In comfort unawakened till this day,  
Which I prevent not, which I will not flee,  
Which shall enwrap us with its dawning fear,  
As we sit still and wait on its approach.  
But what shall be thereafter well I know  
And what the evils falling on the state.

## THE QUEEN OF CHINA

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In a few years this country shall decay,  
Our joyous houses and our porcelain towers  
Shall be thrown down and all the garden-walks  
Be choked with darnel and the hungry thistle  
And barren weeds that turn the land to waste.  
The enemy shall cast us down and rise  
In hideous triumph on our fallen bodies:  
The capital shall be deserted, yea,  
The planks of the thronged wharves shall warp  
and start,  
Strange river-snails crawl over them, the worms  
That in the river's bottom have their home  
Shall eat with puny teeth the seasoned baulks  
And bring the whole to ruin. The canals,  
Placid and level, only now disturbed  
By passage of our wealthy merchandise,  
Shall be stopped up with growth of water-weed  
And spread their sluggish floods among the crops.  
The royal roads shall pit and rut and break  
With softening rain and the disrupting frost.  
Yea, even the goldfish in the garden-court  
Shall weep this day,  
For when our city's fired, their bowl will crack  
And leave them to be choked in bitter air.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Must all the people slumber  
with the prince  
Nor wake at any call to know these wrongs?

CHAMBERLAIN: You know not how we are ringed  
with enemies.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Soften your voices. Leave the  
king to sleep,

Till the full sun is risen on the earth.  
There is miraculous healing in the light

For broken spirits, there's no cordial  
For grief that can be likened to the sun,  
No cloak beneath which sorrow festers more  
Than darkness and there is no poison known,  
That worse can rankle in the spiritual wound,  
Than this gray merciless light of early dawn.

CHAMBERLAIN: The king sleeps well. Would  
that I too could sleep  
And find forgetfulness of misery.

SECOND TRAVELLER: But he is sicker than his  
helpless son.  
See how the bright eyes through the wearing lids  
Shine out with fever, how his wasting hands  
Grow thinner, whiter. He is close to death.  
O, fetch the doctors for him!

CHAMBERLAIN: They have fled,  
Fearing his wrath most foolishly.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Alas!  
For the wise men whose wisdom fails them now.  
How are we better?

FIRST TRAVELLER: Soft! the king awakes!

KING: I have slept long and still mine eyes are  
heavy;  
You should have waked me, I have slept too  
long.

FIRST TRAVELLER: You have slept ten minutes,  
sire. Lie down again  
For you are weary and in need of rest  
And we will wake you at a better time.

KING: I have slept too long already. Now I know  
Why I am weary. Is the last one gone?

CHAMBERLAIN: The last has gone and left no  
hope behind.

KING: And my son sleeps yet? Has not once he stirred?

FIRST TRAVELLER: His breathing has not altered through the night,

Not even in the dim and dreadful hour

When the waking are most sad and the sick oft die.

KING: Send for that ancient man again. I'll ask him

If he has used up all his armoury

Of quaint extravagant devices now.

Strange that we do expect beneath the veil

Of rustic mannerlessness in learned men

A more than common wisdom.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Let him sleep, sire,  
And you too sleep. There is no profit now  
In waking.

KING: I will see him, I will ask him  
What he can do—whether he— Send for him!

SECOND TRAVELLER: Let it all rest, my lord, I do  
implore you,  
Till there's warm light to see by.

KING (*as if dazed or in a dream*): Send for him!  
I am told to ask you for him.

*The FIRST TRAVELLER makes a sign that the KING  
is to be obeyed*

CHAMBERLAIN: I will bring him.  
He rises early and is with his books  
By the first light. I'll bring him to you soon.

*He goes out*

FIRST TRAVELLER: Give me your hands, sir. They  
are cold and I

Will warm them 'twixt my palms.

KING:

I am all cold

And neither sunshine nor the bright coal-fire  
Nor human blood can warm my limbs again,  
For the chill spreads outward, moving from the  
heart.

*The CHAMBERLAIN comes in, followed by the*

OLD SCHOLAR

KING (*listlessly*): Are you so old that you have  
done with sleep,

To be thus early playing with your books?

OLD SCHOLAR: Why have you sent for me?

KING:

You have cured my son,

Have you not cured him? Go and look at him,  
How the sweet sleep of health doth wrap him up  
And sooth his body.

FIRST TRAVELLER (*secretly*): This is too much pain  
And we are tightened even to cracking point.

(*Aloud*) Observe your patient, old and learned  
doctor,

On whom your fine device has fallen as light  
As snow on water. Stay among your pens!  
You have held us all a night with foolish hopes  
And cloaked our brains in fancy till the dawn  
With cold and pitiless finger pointed at us  
For fools in the light's eyes and in our own.

OLD SCHOLAR: Is the Prince dead?

FIRST TRAVELLER:

He sleeps

and sleeps and sleeps

Untouched by your contrivings.

OLD SCHOLAR:

This is strange!

I am amazed. My science is not vain:



I have not duped myself with lying arts  
And transient, to gather empty praise.

KING: The King dismisses you; stay here no longer.

I might have racked you but I have no will  
To add to the world's sum of pain.

OLD SCHOLAR: Softly, my friend; I am no charlatan.

Have you observed with order what I bade you?  
Have all passed by him and laid hands on him?

CHAMBERLAIN: All have gone by and played the sorry part.

The slaves infect the chamber with their breath  
Of kitchens hot and the rank stable-smells  
To no avail.

OLD SCHOLAR: Have all his friends gone by?

FIRST TRAVELLER: Even we, we four, when waiting grew too long,

To break the night, made spaces in the file  
And touched his head ourselves and left him sleeping.

OLD SCHOLAR: Have all the women passed?

SECOND TRAVELLER (*sharply but secretly*): Unlucky word!

FIRST TRAVELLER: The youngest slave that crouches at the spit

Has touched the Prince.

OLD SCHOLAR: Has the Queen been here?

*There is a dead silence*

KING: Who speaks of the Queen?

CHAMBERLAIN:

He said, sire—

KING:

What, the Queen?

Last farcical and pitiful invention  
To play his mummery out with. Idle sir,  
Will you pursue your drollery to the end?  
Have you no drug, no novel incantation  
To play a change with?

OLD SCHOLAR: I have said my word.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Dismiss this fool, sire.

KING: Shall we play it out?

There's all the morning to be travelled through  
And nought to do it in. We'll fetch the Queen  
If this impostor will be satisfied.  
She lies in the pavilion by the lake  
And does not rise until the day's more up.

*He goes to the window*

SECOND TRAVELLER (*to the CHAMBERLAIN*): You  
guessed! You too!

CHAMBERLAIN (*to the SECOND TRAVELLER*): I  
would not think of it,

But now it's on us.

SECOND TRAVELLER: What shall we do now?

CHAMBERLAIN: Blow blindly on like gnats before  
a storm.

There's nothing else.

KING: See, still the light is yellow in her windows,  
A sallow radiance against the dawn,  
That tells of guttering candles. Go to her.

*The CHAMBERLAIN bows and goes out*

SECOND TRAVELLER (*secretly*): Old man, you can-  
not guess what you have said!

Unsay your foolish word and bring him back,  
Else equally our happiness is lost

And China ruined. O, a hate begun  
Between a king and his succeeding heir  
Hath more of evil in it than the plague  
That feeds on life.

OLD SCHOLAR: My science is not vain,  
As you have vainly said. Let hate begin  
And wreck the land and pull the people down!  
I have seen five kings on whom the kingdom hung  
By a parting thread and still we live in peace.  
What is your kingdom? what your government?  
I see you from my height of ancient knowledge  
Like ants acrawl, as busy and as vain.  
Men without learning are even as the ants,  
Who heap a mighty commonwealth of dust,  
Bridging great rivers, tunnelling great hills  
And cutting down enormous blades of grass.  
They are purposeless and leave no mark behind.

FIRST TRAVELLER: The Queen is coming, sir, and  
still she wears  
The silks of yesterday.

SECOND TRAVELLER (*secretly*): True-founded fears!  
Now for the storm.

*The QUEEN and the CHAMBERLAIN come in*

QUEEN: My lord, what must I do?  
Long waking has so worn my heavy eyes,  
That in this ghostly and uncertain light  
I scarce can see.

KING: O, you must touch him, lady.  
Learning this most fantastic cure devises  
And learning is our master. This old man  
Conceives my son to bear a mental wound,  
Which nothing but a magic touch may heal

And that touch in the wounding hand resides.  
Since by light chance you may have wounded  
him—

So learning's logic goes—do me this service:  
Go in and touch him.

QUEEN: Is it nothing more  
But only this? My hands are yours alone,  
Should you desire them severed at the wrists.  
Lead me on, chamberlain, where I must go.

*The CHAMBERLAIN leads her behind the curtain*

OLD SCHOLAR: The Prince himself shall tell me  
he is cured;  
Send him to me for I have much to do.

*He goes out*

FIRST TRAVELLER: Now bends she above him, as  
a branch of blossoms  
At sweet compulsion bends, in a lovely curve.

*There is a dead silence*

PRINCE (*behind the curtain*): Pull down those  
flowers that brush upon my face  
And make a garland of them for my head;  
The gods are kindly to the garlanded  
And love not them that walk with undecked brow.

FIRST TRAVELLER: He wakes! He speaks!  
What—

KING: Draw the curtain back!

*The SECOND TRAVELLER throws back the curtain.  
The PRINCE is seen, half sitting up, drawing the  
QUEEN uncertainly towards him, as though still  
in a dream*

PRINCE: Have I been sleeping? All night long I dreamed

That flowers drooped on me and your face among them.

I feel so light, so light, my heart assuaged  
That ached and smarted. My limbs feel so free!  
Give me your hands again.

KING: My son! My son!

FIRST TRAVELLER: Take her away from him! Ah, this is madness!

My lord, the trance hath worked upon his brain  
And his slow-moving and infected blood  
Bears along poisonous fancies in its flow.

My lord, it is the sickness still that sways.

SECOND TRAVELLER (*muttering*): You know it is not.

KING: Ah, my son! my son!

QUEEN (*softly, near weeping*): Unclasp his hands and give him cordial:

The quickening liquor shall bring back his wits.  
Unclasp his fingers, chamberlain. You see  
How tightly they have closed upon my hand  
So that I cannot get away from him.  
I have done my part now; let the doctors come,  
Who shall restore him.

PRINCE (*fully awake*): What am I dreaming now?  
What am I clasping? Is it you indeed?  
And is all ended that deep-scored my heart,  
A hundred harrow-points in every day,  
That caught and tore the tender fibres up,  
Each time I saw you? Do not leave me now,  
I am hardly cured, hardly aware of health,  
That yet is entering the open sluices

And that touch in the wounding hand resides.  
 Since by light chance you may have wounded  
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So learning's logic goes—do me this service:  
 Go in and touch him.

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## THE QUEEN OF CHINA

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PRINCE: Have I been sleeping? All night long  
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That flowers drooped on me and your face among  
them.

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That ached and smarted. My limbs feel so free!  
Give me your hands again.

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What am I clasping? Is it you indeed?

And is all ended that deep-scored my heart,  
A hundred harrow-points in every day,  
That caught and tore the tender fibres up,  
Each time I saw you? Do not leave me now,  
I am hardly cured, hardly aware of health,  
That yet is entering the open sluices

And filling up my body.

QUEEN (*struggling*): Let me go!  
The King is here.

KING (*to FIRST TRAVELLER*): Give me your hand,  
good friend,  
And help me from the place. I'll leave them here.  
There is another room not far from this,  
Where sometimes in the morning I have sat  
And counted breaking buds upon the limes.  
I can just go so far. I'll lean on you.

PRINCE: O love, my throat and utterance are  
choked up,  
My heart rejects its business. Speak for me  
And tell me of the love between us two,  
So long time nourished secretly.

QUEEN (*weeping*): My love!

*She goes into his arms*

KING: It is done. They see no more of us, no  
more.

Our place is not within the bridal-chamber,  
Whence ancient men and foolish are shut out.  
Take me hence, friends.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Sir, you must speak to them  
And cheer them ere you go, lest they imagine  
Fain shapes of royal wrath and shameful death,  
That kings' wives know of and their paramours.

KING: O, this is hard to do. My son! My son!

PRINCE: Father, are you too here? O, I am  
joyful

That you have read my secret and confirmed  
By this last seal the happiness you give me.  
Is she not fair? I am struck by wonder at her



And cannot speak.

KING:                   My son, I give you her;  
Love her as I do and it is enough.  
My queen, a last time you shall be my queen  
And sit beside me at the audience,  
Which, many years after that I am dead,  
Again you'll grace as queen, though then not mine.  
Much is to do to-day. The audience  
Is packed with business of a weighty sort,  
Your marriage first and then the declaration  
Of war against the Tartars, which shall be  
The last act of my reign. Old Chamberlain,  
Send for the general, who counselled me  
A war of mighty scope and purposes.  
Together we will plan it and together  
We'll head the armies. But the marriage first!  
Good luck's with us, this is the time of flowers  
And flowers shall deck the bridal. Lead, my queen;  
Your prince shall follow.

*He takes the QUEEN by the hand and conducts her  
to the door. She goes out, while he remains in  
the doorway*

KING:                   For the old, old men,  
There's nothing and the young are heirs of all.  
O, it is bitter for an ancient man,  
Who sees the years dissolve like smoke before him  
And nothing through them but the unfriendly  
grave,  
To know his last delight deserts his side,  
His last fool's hope of youthfulness in eld.  
Each disappointment that we know in youth  
Is wrapped up by the tale of years to spend

And hurts us not, but now the years peel off  
And naked sorrow stands before mine eyes  
Without a hope to hide her ugliness.  
Come with me, friends.

*He leads out the TRAVELLERS and the CHAMBER-  
LAIN. The PRINCE sits up in bed, rubbing his  
eyes. His SERVANT enters*

SERVANT:                   The bath is ready, sir.  
The waters, wherein pleasant scents do swim,  
Await your body.

PRINCE (*leaping out of bed*): I am coming to it.  
Set out my robes, that there be no delay:  
I feel already what short time's a day.

*They go out in different directions and the stage is  
left empty. A GIRL'S VOICE is heard singing outside*

### SONG

The spring will soon be over,  
The withered flowers are falling,  
The crops are growing higher  
And harsh the cuckoo's calling,  
But when the spring is over,  
I still shall have my lover.

For spring is but a season  
And love is a delight  
That knows not age nor waning  
And hath an endless might,  
And when the spring is over  
I still shall have my lover.

*The Curtain falls*

1915-1917

## FEAR IN THE NIGHT

I AM afraid to-night,  
We are too glad, too gay,  
Our life too sweet, too bright  
To last another day.

What hap, what chance can fall,  
What sorrow come, what schism,  
What loss, what cataclysm  
To part us two at all?

The stars with ageless fire  
In skies serene the same  
Smile down on our desire  
And watch our loves aflame.

A whisper soft, a sound,  
Unfollowed, unattended,  
Shakes all the branches round:  
They sleep and it is ended.

You sleep and I alone  
Torment myself with fear  
For new joys coming near  
And gracious actions done.

## FEAR IN THE NIGHT

I am afraid to-night,  
We are too glad, too gay,  
Our life too sweet, too bright  
To last another day.

## SONNETS ON SEPARATION

### I

THE time shall be, old Wisdom says, when you  
Shall grow awrinkled and I, indifferent,  
Shall no more follow the light steps I knew  
Or trace you, finding out the way you went,  
By swinging branches and the displaced flowers  
Among the thickets. I no more shall stand,  
With careful pencil through the adoring hours  
Scratching your grace on paper. My still hand  
No more shall tremble at the touch of yours  
And I'll write no more songs and you'll not sing.  
But this is all a lie, for love endures  
And we shall closer kiss, remembering  
How budding trees turned barren in the sun  
Through this long week, whereof one day's now  
done.

### II

The time is all so short. One week is much  
To be without your deep and peaceful eyes,  
Your soft and all-contenting cheek, the touch  
Of well-caressing hands. O, were we wise  
We would not love too strongly, would not bind  
Life into life so inextricably,  
That the dumb body suffers with the mind  
In a sad partnership this agony.

For death will come and swallow up us two,  
 You there, I here, and we shall lie apart,  
 Out of the houses and the woods we knew.  
 Then, in the lonely grave, my dust-choked heart  
 Out of the dust will raise, if it can speak,  
 A threnody for this lost, lovely week.

## III

Is there no prophylactic against love?  
 Can I with drugs not dull the ache one night?  
 The rain is heavy and the low clouds move  
 Over the empty home of our delight  
 And find me in it weeping. You are far  
 And you are now asleep. The night's so thick,  
 Not even one stooping and compassionate star  
 Shines on us both parted. O, be quick,  
 Torturing days and heavy, turn your hours  
 To minutes, melt yourselves into one day!  
 . . . The cold rain falls in swift assailing showers,  
 Darkness is round me and light far away.  
 I'm in our well-known room and you're shut in  
 By strange unfriendly walls I've never seen.

## IV

Lovers that drug themselves for ecstasy  
 Seek love too closely in an overdose,  
 When the sweet spasm turns to agony  
 And the quick limbs are still and the eyes  
     close.  
 I too, a fool, desired—to make love strong—  
 Absence and parting, but the measure's brimmed,

The dose is over-poured, the time's too long  
 Already, though two nights have hardly dimmed  
 My lonely eyes with the elusive sleep.  
 O, I'll remember, I'll not wish again  
 To go with ardent limbs into this deep  
 Sea of dejection, this dull flood of pain:  
 We'll love our safer loves upon the shore  
 And quest for inexperienced joys no more.

## v

Through the closed curtains comes the early sun,  
 First a pale finger, preluding the hand.  
 Outside more certainly the day's begun,  
 Where bright and brighter still the chestnuts  
     stand,  
 Broad candles lighting up at the first fire.  
 I stir and turn in my uneasy sleep  
 But in my sorrow sleep's my whole desire.  
 About the still room small glints move and creep  
 Silently, stealthily on wall and chair,  
 Till to strong rays and shining lights they grow,  
 Which with their magic change the waiting air  
 And all its sleeping motes to gold and throw  
 A golden radiance on your empty bed,  
 Which wakes me with vain likeness to your head.

## vi

To-morrow I shall see you come again  
 Between the pale trees, through the sullen gate,  
 Out of the dark and secret house of pain  
 Where lie the unhappy and unfortunate.



To-morrow you will live with me and love me,  
 Spring will go on again, I'll see the flowers  
 And little things, ridiculous things, shall move me  
 To smiles or tears or verse. The world is ours  
 To-morrow. Open heaths, tall trees, great skies,  
 With massive clouds that fly and come again,  
 Sweet-smelling fields, and rivers and the rise  
 And fall of swelling land from the swift train  
 We'll see together, knowing that all this  
 Is one great room wherein we two may kiss.

## VII

We're at the world's top now. The hills around  
 Stand proud in order with the valleys deep,  
 The hills with pastures drest, with tall trees  
     crowned,  
 And the low valleys dipt in sunny sleep.  
 A sound brims all the country up, a noise  
 Of wheels upon the road and labouring bees  
 And trodden heather, mixing with the voice  
 Of small lost winds that die among the trees.  
 And we are prone beneath the flooding sun,  
 So drenched, so soaked in the unceasing light,  
 That colours, sounds and your close presence are  
     one,  
 A texture woven up of all delight,  
 Whose shining threads my hands may not undo,  
 Yet one thread runs the whole bright garment  
     through.

## THE COMRADES

THE men that marched and sang with me  
Are most of them in Flanders now:  
I lie abed and hear the wind  
Blow softly through the budding bough.

And they are scattered far and wide  
In this or that brave regiment;  
From trench to trench across the mud  
They go the way that others went.

They run with deadly bayonet  
Or lie and take their careful aim,  
And theirs it is to learn of death,  
And theirs the joy and theirs the fame.

## IN TRAINING

THE wind is cold and heavy  
And storms are in the sky:  
Our path across the heather  
Goes higher and more high.

To right, the town we came from,  
To left, blue hills and sea:  
The wind is growing colder  
And shivering are we.

We drag with stiffening fingers  
Our rifles up the hill.  
The path is steep and tangled  
But leads to Flanders still.

## THE OLD SOLDIERS

WE come from dock and shipyard, we come from  
car and train,  
We come from foreign countries to slope our arms  
again  
And, forming fours by numbers or turning to the  
right,  
We're learning all our drill again and 'tis a pretty  
sight.

Our names are all unspoken, our regiments for-  
gotten,  
For some of us were pretty bad and some of us  
were rotten  
And some will misremember what once they learnt  
with pain  
And hit a bloody serjeant and go to clink again.

## GOING IN TO DINNER

BEAT the knife on the plate and the fork on the can,  
For we're going in to dinner, so make all the noise  
you can,

Up and down the officer wanders, looking blue,  
Sing a song to cheer him up, he wants his dinner  
too.

March into the village-school, make the tables  
rattle

Like a dozen dam' machine guns in the bloody  
battle,

Use your forks for drum-sticks, use your plates  
for drums,

Make a most infernal clatter, here the dinner  
comes!

## ON TREK

UNDER a gray dawn, timidly breaking,  
Through the little village the men are waking,  
Easing their stiff limbs and rubbing their eyes;  
From my misted window I watch the sun rise.  
In the middle of the village a fountain stands,  
Round it the men sit, washing their red hands.  
Slowly the light grows, we call the roll over,  
Bring the laggards stumbling from their warm  
    cover,  
Slowly the company gathers all together  
And the men and the officer look shyly at the  
    weather.  
By the left, quick march! Off the column goes.  
All through the village all the windows uncloze:  
At every window stands a child, early waking,  
To see what road the company is taking.

## LEAVING THE BILLET

Good luck, good health, good temper, these,  
A very hive of honey bees  
To make and store up happiness,  
Should wait upon you without cease,  
If I'd the power to call them down  
Into this stuffy little town,  
Where the dull air in sticky wreaths  
Afflicts a man each time he breathes.  
But since I have no power to call  
Benevolent spirits down at all,  
I'll wish you all the good I know  
And close the chapter up and go.

## THE FAREWELL

FAREWELL to rising early, now comes the lying late,  
And long on the parade-ground my company shall  
wait

Before I come to join it on mornings cold and dark  
And no more shall I lead it across the rimy park.

The men shall still manoeuvre in sunshine and in  
rain

And still they'll make the blunders I shall not  
check again;

They'll march upon the highway in weather foul  
and fair

And talk and sing with laughter and I shall not be  
there.



## ON ACCOUNT OF ILL-HEALTH

You go, brave friends, and I am cast to stay behind,  
To read with frowning eyes and discontented mind  
The shining history that you are gone to make,  
To sleep with working brain, to dream and to awake  
Into another day of most ignoble peace,  
To drowse, to read, to smoke, to pray that war may cease.  
The spring is coming on, and with the spring you go  
In countries where strange scents on the April breezes blow;  
You'll see the primroses marched down into the mud,  
You'll see the hawthorn-tree wear crimson flowers of blood  
And I shall walk about, as I did walk of old,  
Where the laburnum trails its chains of useless gold,  
I'll break a branch of may, I'll pick a violet  
And see the new-born flowers that soldiers must forget,  
I'll love, I'll laugh, I'll dream and write undying songs  
But with your regiment my marching soul belongs.

Men that have marched with me and men that I  
have led  
Shall know and feel the things that I have only  
read,  
Shall know what thing it is to sleep beneath the  
skies  
And to expect their death what time the sun shall  
rise.  
Men that have marched with me shall march to  
peace again,  
Bringing for plunder home glad memories of pain,  
Of toils endured and done, of terrors quite brought  
under,  
And all the world shall be their plaything and their  
wonder.  
Then in that new-born world, unfriendly and  
estranged,  
I shall be quite alone, I shall be left unchanged.

## THE DEAD POET

WHEN I grow old they'll come to me and say:  
Did you then know him in that distant day?  
Did you speak with him, touch his hand, observe  
The proud eyes' fire, soft voice and light lips'  
curve?

And I shall answer: This man was my friend:  
Call to my memory, add, improve, amend  
And count up all the meetings that we had  
And note his good and touch upon his bad.

When I grow older and more garrulous,  
I shall discourse on the dead poet thus:  
I said to him . . . he answered thus to me. . . .  
He dined with me one night in Trinity. . . .  
I supped with him in King's. . . . Ah, pitiful  
The twisted memories of an ancient fool  
Beside the silence of a young man dead!  
Now far in Scyros sleeps that golden head,  
Unchanged, serene, for ever young and strong,  
Lifted above the chances that belong  
To us who live, for he shall not grow old  
And only of his youth there shall be told  
Magical stories, true and wondrous tales,  
As of a god whose virtue never fails,  
Whose limbs shall never waste, eyes never fall,  
And whose clear brain shall not be dimmed at all.

## THE POOL

Out of that noise and hurry of large life  
The river flings me in an idle pool:  
The waters still go on with stir and strife  
And sunlit eddies, and the beautiful  
Tall trees lean down upon the mighty flow,  
Reflected in the movement. Beauty there  
Waxes more beautiful, the moments grow  
Thicker and keener in that lovely air  
Above the river. Here small sticks and straws  
Come now to harbour, gather, lie and rot,  
Out of cross-currents and the water's flaws  
In this unmoving death, where joy is not,  
Where war's a shade again, ambition rotten  
And bitter hopes and fears alike forgotten.

## THE HOLIDAY

THE world's great ways uncloseth  
Through little wooded hills:  
An air that stirs and stills  
Dies sighing where it rose  
Or flies to sigh again

In elms, whose stately rows  
Receive the summer rain,  
And clouds, clouds, clouds go by,  
A drifting cavalry,  
In squadrons that disperse

And troops that reassemble  
And now they pass and now  
Their glittering wealth disburse

On tufted grass atremble  
And lately leafing bough.  
Thus through the shining day  
We'll love or pass away  
Light hours in golden sleep,

With clos'd half-sentient eyes  
And lids the light comes through,  
As sheep and flowers do

Who no mad toils devise,  
While shining insects creep  
About us where we lie  
Beneath a pleasant sky,

In fields no trouble fills,  
Whence, as the traveller goes,  
The world's great ways unclose  
Through little wooded hills.

## A NEW SONG ABOUT THE SEA

FROM Amberley to Storrington,  
From Storrington to Amberley,  
From Amberley to Washington  
You cannot see or smell the sea.

But why the devil should you wish  
To see the home of silly fish?

Since I prefer the earth and air,  
The fish may wallow in the sea  
And live the life that they prefer,  
If they will leave the land to me,  
So wish for each what he may wish,  
The earth for me, the sea for fish.

## FOR REMEMBRANCE

LET us remember how we came  
To Fletching in the trees,  
Where stood the high and misty down  
Between us and the seas.

Let us remember how we crossed  
Ouse, Adur, Arun, three  
Slight rivers rolling in their broad  
Green valleys to the sea.

Let us remember most of all  
When this bright air no more  
We breathe, what young and morning oaths  
On the high hills we swore.



## THE FIELDS ARE FULL

THE fields are full of summer still  
And breathe again upon the air  
From brown dry side of hedge and hill  
More sweetness than the sense can bear.

So some old couple, who in youth  
With love were filled and over-full,  
And loved with strength and loved with truth,  
In heavy age are beautiful.

## THE IDYLL

THIS is the valley where we linger now,  
Cut up by narrow brooks and rich and green  
And shaded sweetly by the waving bough  
About the trench where floats the soft serene  
Arun with waters running low and low  
Through banks where lately still the tide has  
been;  
Here is our resting-place, you walk with me  
And watch the light die out in Amberley.

The light that dies is soft and flooding still,  
Shed from the broad expanse of all the skies  
And brimming up the space from hill to hill,  
Where yet the sheep in their sweet exercise,  
Roaming the meadows, crop and find their fill  
And to each other speak with moaning cries;  
We, on the hill-side standing, rest and see  
The light die out from stream and grass and tree.

To-day we walked upon the lonely downs  
And through the still heat of the heavy day  
Heard the vague medley of low drifting sounds  
And through the matted brambles plucked our  
way  
Or lightly sauntered over freer grounds  
Musing, or with rich blackberries made delay,

Where feed such fruit on the rich air, until  
We struck like falling stars from Bignor Hill.

Down the vast slope, by chalky roads and steep,  
With trees and bushes hidden here and there,  
By circling turns into the valley deep  
We came and left behind the hill-top air  
For this cool village where to-night we sleep,  
A country meal, a country bed to share,  
With sleepy kisses and contented dreams  
Over the land of still and narrow streams.

The light is ebbing in the dusky sky,  
The valley-floor is in the shadow. Hark!  
With rushing and mysterious noises fly  
The bats already, looking for the dark  
With blinking still and unaccustomed eye.  
Now over Rackham Mount a steady spark  
Burns, rising slowly in the rising night,  
Pledging us peace and promising delight.

Now from the east the wheeling shade appears  
And softly night into the valley falls,  
Soft on the meadows drop her happy tears,  
Softly a darkness on the crumbled walls.  
Now in the dusk the village disappears,  
Men's talk is hushed there and the children's  
calls,  
While night in passage swallows up the land  
And in the shadow your hand seeks my hand.

Only the glimmering stars in heaven lie  
And unseen trees with rustling still betray

How all the valley lives invisibly,  
Where dim sweet odours, remnants of the day,  
Float from the sleeping flowers to please and die,  
Borne up by roaming airs, that drift away  
Beyond our hearing, vagabond and light,  
To visit the cool meadows of the night.

## PASTORAL

Who are those lying naked on the hill  
Whom the low hawthorn shelters from the sun?  
—A shepherd and his nymph, at kissing still  
And making love, though spring is nearly done.  
He kissed her first when spring was just begun  
And forest trees awake with pleasant sound,  
When from the creeping plants long trailers run  
Across the clearings, broidering the ground  
And shedding faint, delicious odours all around.

His sheep forgetting, on his way he came,  
His shepherd's crook swung idly at his side:  
He hung his head and blushed with tender  
    shame,  
Soft air provoked his blood as yet untried.  
When sudden through the branches he espied  
Clothed in wild flesh the wildness of the spring  
That beckoned him and fled. He turned aside  
And saw her shining shoulder vanishing  
And left the path in haste to seek so fair a thing.

He followed on a root-entangled road,  
Through sighing saplings, under blossomed  
    trees,  
By hollow trunks whose murmurs faint forebode  
The labour and the anger of the bees.

Still he essayed her flying form to seize,  
That still escaped the clutching of his hand,  
And followed on the flashing of white knees,  
Till in an open glade she came to stand.  
He caught at her, they fell, far from the pasture  
land.

The fauns had played with her by night and day  
And kissed her, lip and breast and flank and eye,  
And Pan had sought her bed one night to stay  
An hour or two until the moon was high.  
She knew the forest's starlit revelry  
But he was nurtured in a village low  
Where men are born and breathe and eat and die  
By consecrated rote and do not know  
How headier than the grape's love's dizzying wine  
can flow.

They loved in youth and joy and kindliness  
In hill-side hollows hidden out of sight  
And forest alleys which the quick months dress  
In changing colours for unchanged delight.  
She seeks him in his orchard trees at night  
And there they lie till dawn on fallen flowers,  
He on her mouth and rosy breast and white  
Limbs gladly spending all his youthful powers,  
While the faint stars mark on the ever-marching  
hours.

And summer now will part them. He will turn  
To find a mortal and a slighter love,  
A village girl, whom seeing, he will burn  
To share her rushen bed with thatch above.

Not long alone in woods the nymph will rove,  
Searching and sighing for the faithless boy  
To whom a month or twain her pleasure clove,  
But all the emblems of their love destroy  
And seek the dear companions of her former joy.

## THE PURSUIT OF DAPHNE

DAPHNE is running, running through the grass,

The long stalks whip her ankles as she goes.  
I saw the nymph, the god, I saw them pass

And how a mounting flush of tender rose  
Invaded the white bosom of the lass

And reached her shoulders, conquering their  
snows.

He wasted all his breath, imploring still:  
They passed behind the shadow of the hill.

The mad course goes across the silent plain,  
Their flying footsteps make a path of sound  
Through all the sleeping country. Now with pain

She runs across a stretch of stony ground  
That wounds her soft-palmed feet and now again

She hastens through a wood where flowers  
abound,

Which for her healing give their trodden heads  
And staunch her cuts with balsam where she treads.

Her sisters, from their coverts unbetrayed,

Look out in fright and see the two go by,  
Each unrelenting, and reflect dismayed

How fear and anguish glisten in her eye.  
By them unhelped goes on the fleeting maid  
Whose breath is coming short in agony:



Hard at her heels pursues the golden boy,  
 She flies in fear of him, she flies from joy.

His arrows scattered on the country-side,  
 His shining bow deserted, he pursues  
 Through hindering woodlands, over meadows  
 wide,

And now no longer as he runs he sues  
 But breathing deep and set and eager-eyed.

His flashing feet disperse the morning dew,  
 His hands most roughly put the boughs away,  
 That cross and cling and join and make delay.

Across small shining brooks and rills they leap  
 And now she fords the waters of a stream;  
 Her hot knees plunge into the hollows deep  
 And cool, where ancient trout in quiet dream;  
 The silver minnows, wakened from their sleep  
 In sunny shallows, round her ankles gleam;  
 She scrambles up the grassy bank and on,  
 Though courage and quick breath are nearly done.

Now in the dusky spinneys round the field,  
 The fauns set up a joyous mimicry,  
 Pursuing of light nymphs, who lightly yield,  
 Or startle the young dryad from her tree  
 And shout with joy to see her limbs revealed  
 And give her grace and bid her swiftly flee:  
 The hunt is up, pursuer and pursued  
 Run, double, twist, evade, turn, grasp, elude.

The woodlands are alive with chase and cry,  
 Escape and triumph. Still the nymph in vain,

With heaving breast in lovely agony  
And wide and shining eyes that show her pain,  
Leads on the god and now she knows him nigh  
And sees before her the unsheltered plain.  
His hot hand touches her white side and she  
Takes the green-blooded safety of the tree.

There is an end of dance and mocking tune,  
Of laughter and bright love among the leaves.  
The sky is overcast, the afternoon  
Is dull and heavy for a god who grieves.  
The woods are quiet and the oak-tree soon  
The ruffled dryad in her trunk receives.  
Cold grow the sunburnt bodies and the white:  
The nymphs and fauns will lie alone to-night.

## SHADOWS

UNDER the leaves of that tremendous oak,  
Where the low stars lie tangled, there is shade  
Delusive and the leafy hedges fade  
Into the darkness like a curling smoke.

O, in the shadow there,  
Come with me, love, there let us two repair  
To mingle with the darkness and be lost,  
As somewhere viewless ghost with viewless ghost  
May meet, caress and shiver with sweet pain,  
Invisibly enamoured. So may we  
Lie in each other's arms invisibly  
And touch and see not, kiss and kiss again  
With lips obscure,  
That find their way as ardent and as sure  
In darkness as in day.

Come! there the softly moving shadows  
And wrap all vision up for dim delight,  
And soothe the straining eyes with oil  
That charms the senses, sends all sound  
And knows for its anointed how to keep  
A magic darkness, an enchanted hush,  
Close in the shade of the uncertain

Still the low stars shall waver overh  
And low clouds hang upon the mi

A softer darkness on our love to shed,  
Where we embrace and kiss invisibly  
    But tangibly,  
And keener still, all senses being gone,  
Save only one bright sense—save touch alone.

## INVITATION

O GIRL with honey-coloured hair,  
And will you come and dance with me?  
The night is dark but you can spare  
Light from your eyes for both to see,  
And in the shade of trees divine  
Like a whirled torch your hair will shine.

So dance apart and dance away;  
The rest about the lanterns gather,  
But there is light for two to play  
In any place where we're together,  
And there is soft long grass and shadow  
Beneath the rick across the meadow.

For love in darkness is at ease  
And likes no candle save the light  
Of kindled eyes and glowing tress  
And bodies luminous with delight.  
The rest about the candles stay:  
O, dance away! O, come away!

## THE DEBT

WHEN I am dead and you gather up my poems,  
Put them all in, all those that speak of you,  
Those that glanced at you in sundry disguises,  
Ariadne, Daphne and the nameless nymph,  
The flower-bright queen who ruled a king in  
China,

And the country-girl that early lost her love.  
Bind up with them the frank and honest sonnets,  
The open songs, the unashamed odes,  
That spoke straight to you and told that I loved  
you,

Described your beauty or called you by name.  
These are not ours; for what I took of beauty  
Belongs to our fellows for whom I write.  
The traces I have left on hill-top and valley  
Were made of the world and belong to the  
world;

But more than half of the loveliness I captured  
Was yours at first and now is the world's.  
Our first hidden kisses and unskilled embraces  
And the fierier love whereto we attained  
Are lines on the chart whereby dreaming lovers  
Shall steer their hearts till the end of the world.  
When we are dead and our ashes are scattered,  
Let them say of us: She was and he wrote.

## WASTE

So rich a treasure in yourself you bring,  
That some is spilt and wasted on the way,  
As low clouds, halting, on wild seas astray,  
Cheat the thick, thirsty blossoms of the spring.  
And some I waste. But in our later years  
We shall remember how, too prodigal,  
We let the precious drops of honey fall,  
And pay for them at last with useless tears.  
Ah, waste, waste, waste! However much there is,  
There's not too much for bare and mortal days,  
That now, receding in youth's golden haze,  
Seem dim but ever full eternities.  
But there's an end! Take heed, lest you and I  
Have wasted wealth to think on when we die.

## THE STORM

WE wake to hear the storm come down,  
Sudden on roof and pane;  
The thunder's loud and the hasty wind  
Hurries the beating rain.

The rain slackens, the wind blows gently,  
The gust grows gentle and stills,  
And the thunder, like a breaking stick,  
Stumbles about the hills.

The drops still hang on leaf and thorn,  
The downs stand up more green;  
The sun comes out again in power  
And the sky is washed and clean.



## THE HALT

*"MARK time in front! Rear fours cover! Company—halt!*

*Order arms! Stand at—ease! Stand easy."* A sudden hush:

And then the talk began with a mighty rush—  
"You weren't ever in step—The sergeant—It wasn't my fault—

Well, the Lord be praised at least for a ten minutes' halt."

We sat on a gate and watched them easing and shifting;

Out of the distance a faint, keen breath came drifting

From the sea behind the hills, and the hedges were salt.

Where do you halt now? Under what hedge do you lie?

Where the tall poplars are fringing the white French roads?

And smoke I have not seen discolours the foreign sky?

Is the company resting there as we rested together,  
Stamping its feet and readjusting its loads

And looking with wary eyes at the drooping weather?

## THE EMPTY HOUSE

### I

WE walked all morning over furze and grass,  
And climbed steep tufted heights against the sun,  
Went down the shaven tracks, where rabbits pass,  
And unalarmed the scuttling pheasants run.  
There were no men in sight, save at a farm,  
Where, far below, we saw about midday,  
Two ploughmen lying lapped about with warm  
Rank growings of the hedge. Green buds of may  
Hung over them unopened, primroses  
Were yellow round their bodies. On we went,  
Up a long slope through tangled coppices,  
Where half-fledged hazels on the pathway leant,  
Till suddenly we saw through thinning boughs  
The chimneys of an old long-lonely house.

### II

The door was gone, the jambs aslant, awry,  
The roof grown over with the mosses slow,  
The windows stared with blank and empty eye,  
Half the panes gone. The flagstones grinned be-  
low  
In gaping cracks. The foolish cattle came  
About the orchard, where the unpruned trees

Held to the sky white boughs of trembling flame,  
And long wild grasses brushed about our knees.  
The dumb house called to us, the black, wide door  
Stood open for us long and stood in vain :  
Sighing we guessed those old walls held a store  
Of rest for us when we should come again  
Into the hollow, long and green and still—  
Then turned away to cross the further hill.

## CONTINUITY

Long after we have ceased to be  
The sun will light in bush and tree  
And shine unchanged; the high turf hill  
Shall stand up in beauty still,  
And all the valleys that we knew  
Put on again the summer's hue,  
When we are gone, when we are gone,  
And are what green things feed upon.

## THE WILD GOOSE CHASE

How long a day through thickets and over stones  
And over broad red furrows fresh from the  
plough,

And hills where low the wind-bent heather drones  
And swift airs whistle round the sky-line bough!  
How the wind clutched at flesh and bowels and  
bones!

How breathless they were all day, how weary  
now,

When in the town beneath a fading light  
They sought a lodging for their transient night.

What in what frenzy did they thus pursue?

Eternal wisdom or the baser gold  
Or pleasures of the senses ever new  
Or rarer spiritual ecstasies still untold?  
From dawn till dusk, with sun, wind, hills, rain,  
dew,

They were burnt or they were weary or they  
were cold

Or wet or dirty. Still they chased untired  
A thing not known but endlessly desired.

But when the chase was done at last, they came  
Into the darkling town with empty hands;  
Their faces through the dusk burnt with a flame

Wind caught, their feet were heavy from marshy  
lands.  
They brought with them no answer to their proud  
claim,  
No prize given over to their loud demands;  
They found an inn, where windows long and low  
Streaked the thick darkness with a golden glow.

Inns of our nights, where we have sat together,  
Boots off and dreaming at the magic fire!  
There the mind's free, the spirit casts its tether  
The thoughts in concert dance and do not tire,  
Till sleep with silent foot and sudden feather  
Brushes his drugs across the joy and desire,  
And all night long is darkness and deep peace,  
In the old inn, walled round with silent trees.

The happy good find this when the day is spent,  
When they have filled their day with seeing and  
knowing.  
Here from their chase they came and found con-  
tent

And reaped at night good grain of early sowing,  
Laughter by tears and joy by sorrow lent  
And gifts on unexpected breezes blowing—  
We too shall sit, after youth's fret and rage,  
In the comfortable bar of middle age.

Yet while light burns and the air aches in our veins  
And we are capable of anger and love,  
Slow fires of the senses, swift play of the brains  
And tenderness and friendliness enough,

156    THE WILD GOOSE CHASE

We will be out in the winds, the dews, the rains,  
    And find our meaning in such transient stuff,  
While through sharp, veering gusts of tears and  
    mirth  
We chase our wild geese over the windy earth.

## WHO KNOWS HOW BEAUTY SPRINGS

Who knows how beauty springs  
Out of the world of things,  
To take the eyes with sudden flame  
And vanish whence it came,  
High above things that vex,  
Fear, covetousness, spite and sex?

Lost in the busy day  
In thoughts that harry and press,  
I knew a young girl passed  
And heard her swinging dress;  
And when I turned I saw,  
Raised on a stair,  
Only her ankle, finely poised  
Against the coloured air.

Who that has known can tell  
How in this world of things,  
Suddenly in the dark day,  
Eternal beauty springs?



## SONG

As I lay in the early sun,  
Stretched in the grass, I thought upon  
My true love, my dear love,  
Who has my heart for ever, '  
Who is my happiness when we meet,  
My sorrow when we sever.  
She is all fire when I do burn,  
Gentle when I moody turn,  
Brave when I am sad and heavy  
And all laughter when I am merry.  
And so I lay and dreamed and dreamed,  
And so the day wheeled on,  
While all the birds with thoughts like mine  
Were singing to the sun.

## THE RETURN

### I

Now into hearts long empty of the sun  
The morning comes again with golden light  
And all the shades of the half-dusk are done  
And all the crevices are suddenly bright.  
So gradually had love lain down to sleep,  
We knew it not; but when we saw his head  
Pillowed and sunken in a trance so deep  
We whispered shuddering that he was dead.  
Then you like Psyche took the light and leant  
Over the monster lying in his place,  
Daring, despairing, trembling as you bent . . .  
But love raised up his new-awakening face  
And into our hearts long empty of the sun  
We felt the sky-distilled bright liquor run.

### II

When love comes back that went in mist and cloud  
He comes triumphant in his pomp and power;  
Voices that muttered long are glad and loud  
To mark the sweetness of the sudden hour.  
How could we live so long in that half-light?  
That opiate shadow, where the deadened nerves  
So soon forget how hills and winds are bright,  
That drugged and sleepy dusk, that only serves

With false shades to conceal the emptiness  
Of hearts whence love has stolen unawares,  
Where creeping doubts and dumb, dull sorrows  
    press  
And weariness with blind eyes gapes and stares.  
This was our state, but now a happy song  
Rings through our inner sunlight all day long.

## III

When that I lay in a mute agony,  
I nothing saw nor heard nor felt nor thought;  
The inner self, the quintessential me,  
In that blind hour beyond all sense was brought  
Hard against pain. I had no body, no mind,  
Nought but the point that suffers joy or loss,  
No eyes in sudden blackness to be blind,  
No brain for swift regrets to run across.  
But when you touched me, when your hot tears  
    fell,  
The point that had been nothing else but pain  
Changed into rapture by a miracle,  
In which all raptures known before were vain.  
Thus loss which bared the utmost shivering nerve  
For joy's precursor in the heart did serve.

## THE COMPLAINTS

*To H. C. Harwood*

### I

WELL, I am tired at last! I put away  
Languor and lassitude and all regrets.  
Better, I said, the dull but solid day  
Than an endless reckoning of hopeless debts,  
Unheard complaints, unanswered prayers, unseen  
Genuflexions to an unbelieved-in God.  
But I am not so dull as I have been;  
Too long this long and lightless way I have trod  
And suddenly now I see what thing I tread,  
Lit by a transient flash of the lightning brain,  
That leaps in the sky an instant and is dead  
But, having shown, needs not to come again.  
Ridiculous treadmill! that the sorry fool  
Thinks is the road to joy, his brain is so dull.

### II

You, to whom Heaven gave all the gifts I need,  
Money and leisure, long I followed you  
And made the lightest line you wrote my creed  
And gave you the extravagant praise I thought  
was due.

I'd sneer at you now, to pay my less lucky case,  
For sneering is easy from the poor to the rich,  
Throw witty songs in your cold and happy face  
And ease on your books the beggar's endless  
itch.

But still from your heaven of unmoved success,  
You cast your gifts to me for my delight,  
You from your wealth to me in wretchedness,  
And every gift of yours in my eyes is bright.  
Strange power, strange happiness, strange poetry!  
That even envy cannot twist awry.

## III

There are many countries that I have not seen,  
And many kinds of men I have not met,  
But all the gracious towns where I have been  
Haunt in my brain and whisper there and set  
Strange echoes going with their lovely names,  
Birdlip and Paris, Fontainebleau and Wells,  
Places that live in me like happy dreams  
And sound in the present day like distant bells.  
Here I am set and there's no end, no end;  
Too soon the vision closes, too long remains,  
Like the last long talk one had with a lost friend,  
Whose memory lingers on, when friendship wanes.  
Better to stay at home! The towns one sees  
Trammel the day with stupid memories.

## IV

I was a soldier once. How fear was then  
Mixed with bright honour and delightful pride!

How different we were from other men,  
Who lived in houses and in houses died!  
How huge the morning was, before the sun  
Sullenly found us marching in the mist!  
And sleep was dark and deep when work was  
done

And food awoke in us a greedy zest.  
But all that's over. I no more shall see,  
Quick to the word and ready to my hand,  
The smooth and easy moving company  
Marching in column on the heathery land.  
There's no pride now and fear's the fear that's  
bred

Of money and suchlike maggots in the head.

## v

I sat once in the curved arm of a tree  
Over the salty marsh, above the wide  
And misty mere, half river and half sea,  
Where faint low hills marked out the further  
side.

Then time passed over as I bade it go,  
Fast when in joy my hurrying heart beat fast,  
And when sweet rest inhabited me, so slow  
I did not know if a day or an hour had passed.  
Thus I retarded or advanced the day,  
That subject and sweet minion of my will,  
But now with stubborn beats the hours go their  
way

Like clouds in a steady wind and new hours still  
Loom up behind them and heavily go by  
In the same swift and daunting *monotony*.

## VI

I am sick of devices and of policies,  
Of the restless nerves, of the itches, aches and  
    strains,  
And the tiresome long pursuit that balances  
My sluggish brain against their stupid brains.  
O, under beauty's whip I still can run  
And match my pace against another's pace;  
I only ask a little air and the sun  
Falling in warmth upon my upward face.  
But these dull rains of weather and the mind  
Shut the world from me in a sombre veil  
And memories of old weariness lie behind  
And hours to be, ill-nourished, clammy, pale,  
Lie on my forward journey and fill the way,  
As the dull day fades into a new dull day.

## VII

When in the mines of dark and silent thought  
Sometimes I delve, and find strange fancies there,  
With heavy labour to the surface brought  
That lie and mock me in the brighter air,  
Poor ores from starvèd lodes of poverty,  
Unfit for working or to be refined,  
That in the darkness cheat the miner's eye,  
I turn away from that base cave, the mind.  
Yet had I but the power to crush the stone  
There are strange metals hid in flakes therein,  
Each flake a spark sole-hidden and alone,  
That only cunning toilsome chemists win.  
All this I know and yet my chemistry  
Fails and the pregnant treasures useless lie.

## VIII

The well-made sonnet takes the summer sea  
Proud in her beauty as a halcyon,  
Her timbers chosen words, and melody  
Filling her sails of rhyme. She passes on  
In majesty and calm, but this I write  
Is like a crazy and a leaky boat,  
Which, with its planks not cut or caulked aright,  
Can hardly on the troubled waters float.  
Now comes an arrogant great wave ahead  
That swamps the blunted bow and spumes along;  
Into the storm I drift in doubt and dread,  
Patient, not brave, enduring but not strong.  
I know not on this huge and angry sea  
How far my wretched ship can carry me.



## MEDITATION IN JUNE, 1917

### I

How can we reason still, how look afar,  
Who, these three years now, are  
Drifting, poor flotsam hugely heaved and hurled  
In the birthday of a world,  
Upon the waves of the creative sea?  
How gain lucidity  
Or even keep the faith wherewith at first  
We met the storm that burst,  
The singing hope of revolution's prime?  
For in that noble time  
We saw the petty world dissolve away  
And fade into a day  
Where dwelt new spirits of a better growth,  
Unchecked by spite and sloth.  
We saw, and even now we seem to see,  
In fitful revery,  
Like hills obscured and hid by earthly mist,  
The hopes that first we kissed:  
We see them, catch at them and lose again  
In apathy and pain  
What maybe was (though it once seemed ours to  
hold)  
No more than fairy gold.

II

We pity those whom quick death overtakes,  
 Though they will never see  
 How hope dissolves and founded loyalty shakes  
 Traitorously, piteously.  
 They lose at most and death is voiceless still  
 Nor whispers in their ears  
 When they are lying on the deep-scarred hill  
 What our calm silence hears.  
 They lose all various life, they lose the day,  
 The clouds, the winds, the rain,  
 The blossoms down a deep-banked road astray  
 They will not see again;  
 Great is their loss but more tremendous things  
 To us at home are given,  
 Doubts, fears and greeds and shameful waver-  
     ings  
 That hide the blood-red heaven.  
 They knew no doubt and fear was soon put  
     by:  
 Freely their souls could move  
 In deeds that gave new life to loyalty,  
 A sharper edge to love.  
 They are the conquerors, the happy dead,  
 Who gave their lives away,  
 And now amid the trenches where they bled,  
 Forgetful of the day,  
 Deaf, blind and unaware, sleep on and on,  
 Nor open eyes to weep,  
 Know nought of what is ended or what begun  
 But only and always sleep.

## III

We said on that first day, we said and swore  
 That self should be no more,  
 That we were risen, that we would wholly be  
 For love and liberty;  
 And in the exhilaration of that oath  
 We cast off spite and sloth  
 And laboured for an hour, till we began,  
 Man after piteous man,  
 To lose the splendour, to forget the dream  
 And leave our noble theme,  
 To find again our lusts and villainies  
 And seek a baser prize;  
 This we have done and what is left undone  
 Cries out beneath the sun.  
 How glad a dawn fades thus in foggy night,  
 Where not a star shines bright!

## IV

Is all then gone? That nobler morning mood  
 When pain appeared an honour and grief a  
     gift  
 And what was difficult was also good?  
 Are all our wishes on the waves adrift?  
 The young, the eager-hearted, they are gone,  
 And we, the stay-at-homes, are tired and old,  
 Careless how carelessly our work is done,  
 Forgetful how that morning rose in gold  
 When all our hearts cried out in unison,  
 Triumphant in the new triumphal sun.  
 How dull a night succeeds! how dark and cold!

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We will arise. Oh, not as then with singing,  
But silence in our mouths and no word said,  
Though wracks of that lost glory round us clinging  
Shame us with broken oaths we swore the dead,  
But steadfast in humility we rise,  
Hoping no glory, having merited none,  
Through the long night to toil with aching eyes  
And pray that our humbler hearts may earn the sun.

## THE FLOWERING TREES

THE wandering year from day to day discloses  
First lenten lilies, then midsummer roses,  
And ends at last in sombre fantasy,  
About the season of the stripping tree,  
With asters and dark daisies and the strange  
Chrysanthemums. And so from change to change  
The shimmering months proceed in shifting  
dresses

And strew the meadows and the wildernesses,  
For there in grass the daffodils are born  
And the wild rose-buds hanging on the thorn.  
All these are good, but this perplexes me,  
That blossom holds not longer on the tree,  
For in the morning the tall pear stands white  
With fragile petals that are shed at night,  
And the apple wears her trembling sweet array  
For hardly longer than a short spring day.  
Would they might further live or would that I  
Might see three springs without a break go by!

## LADY GODIVA

(A third version)

If the truth were but known, when she came at last  
To the bower's low door and the journey was past,  
Godiva slid from her palfrey and said:  
Only one with a curious eye in his head?

For why had she gone with not even a shift  
Through the still grey streets, where her hair's  
gold drift  
On shoulder and breast and side made one  
With the bright veil cast on her by the sun?

O surely it had been braver, and sweet,  
To have lavished her beauty along the street,  
To have ridden in the eyes and the smiles of the  
crowd  
And to have heard their praises, muttered or loud.

For else her ride was only a ride,  
Nothing done, nothing given, nothing beside,  
No shame, no sacrifice made, no pain,  
But a fresh, cool journey and home again.

She frowned as she stood up bare in her bower,  
White as a pearl and fresh as a flower,  
Then smiled as she thought that there had been one  
And that Peeping Tom was better than none.

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## ON HOLMBURY HILL

THE narrow paths branch every way up here  
And cross and tangle and are nowhere clear  
And the empty sky, swept clean by a rainy breath,  
Smiles on our tortuous scramblings underneath.  
But here's the top, for round a sudden bend  
We stumble breathless on the unlooked-for end  
And stare across the misty weald. Below  
The lonely trains through the wide country go,  
Each with its plume of steam. And westward, see,  
Past the far shoulder streams tumultuously  
A black and driven storm across the air  
And casts about the downs its troubled hair.  
Thick at the middle, at the edges thinned,  
Heeling over like a ship before the wind,  
It eats the weald up with a greedy mouth.  
Still, twenty miles or further to the south,  
Dimly and grandly Chanctonbury stands  
A moment clear above the blotted lands.  
It's gone. But still the blue and empty sky  
Smiles on over our heads unwittingly.

## ELEGY

*(For J. N., died of wounds, October, 1916)*

So you are dead. We lived three months together,  
But in these years how absence can divide!  
We did not meet again. I wonder whether  
You thought of me at all before you died.

There in that whirl of unaccustomed faces,  
Strange, friendless, ill, I found in you a friend  
And then at last in these divided places  
You there in France, I here—and this the end.

For friendship's memory was short and faithless  
And time went by that would not come again,  
And you are dead of wounds and I am scatheless  
Save as my heart has sorrowed for my slain.

I wonder whether you were long in dying,  
Where, in what trench, and under what dim  
star,  
With drawn face on the clayey bottom lying,  
While still the untiring guns cried out afar.

I might have been with you, I might have seen you  
Reel to the shot with blank and staring eye,  
I might have held you up . . . I might have been you  
And lain instead of you where now you lie.

Here in our quietude strange fancy presses,  
Dark thoughts of woe upon the empty brain,  
And fills the streets and the pleasant wildernesses  
With forms of death and ugly shapes of pain.

You are long dead. A year is nearly over,  
But still your voice leaps out again amid  
The tangled memories that lie and cover  
With countless trails what then we said and did.

And still in waking dreams I sit and ponder  
Pleasures that were and, as my working brain  
Deeper in revery will stray and wander,  
I think that I shall meet with you again

And make my plans and half arrange the meeting,  
And half think out the words that will be said  
After the first brief, careless pleasant greeting. . . .  
Then suddenly I remember you are dead.

## THE WISH

Would that I were away now  
From the iron streets and the steel sky,  
For filthy are these streets in rain  
And hard and dusty dry.  
Harshly the 'buses clang their way,  
The people are ugly that go by;  
They hurry and their mouths are hard  
And they are hard of heart and eye.

I stand on the station every day  
To catch the crowded, swaying train  
But if I only look down the line  
I turn away in sudden pain,  
For an elm stands at the curve of the rail  
That beckons me out, out again,  
Whether its leaves flash in the sun  
Or the bare boughs drip with rain.

The frost has my small town now  
And the street is iron there too,  
For it stands in a high cup of the hills,  
Right in the north wind's view;  
But the steel sky is beautiful there  
And the people that hurry there are few  
And the bare hedges that catch the sun  
Tremble with frosty dew.

Though it be cold, I wish I were there  
To see slow winter move  
And the elms growing green again  
And the blackthorn that I love.  
Though spring's late there, it comes at last  
In the meadow and the thin beech-grove,  
And happy I might lie there in May  
With a long green bough above.

## SEARCHLIGHTS

(In the manner of Paul Fort)

O SEARCHLIGHTS, pierce the nights with swords  
and drive the stars in ruin thence; the moon in cold  
indifference looks down upon your leaping hordes.

Storm the old ramparts of the sky and shake the  
planets all awry, pull, if you can, the young moon  
down upon the house-tops of the town.

The rosy sky adrowsing lay but now the night's  
alive with fire, new pulses in the veins of night,  
quick phantoms of a fiercer fire.

Then fly, bright clouds, across the air and meet  
and interchange and merge and flood the sky with  
flame, submerge the planets in your ghostly glare.

O not with swords you now invade the ancient  
kingdom of the stars but armed with soft and  
fluent blades you break black heaven's tremendous  
bars

And seize those pale and stately lights that move  
and move invisibly and whirl them up and down  
the sky, your followers, your satellites!

And while across the night you fling your blue  
and brilliant garlanding, even the cold indifferent  
moon moves gaily to a soundless tune;

And all the shades that used to lie still in the  
silent streets and sleep, rise up and move fan-  
tastically in time with you and leap and leap!

## BALLAD

### HE

O, WHERE are you, my own true love,  
And why are you not here?  
The nightingale amid the boughs  
Is flattering his dear.

The night among the empty fields  
Lies like a child at rest,  
But empty, empty are my arms,  
And light, too light my breast.

### SHE

If you had known what I have known,  
The harsh word and the blow,  
The sour meal and the heavy task,  
You would not chide me so.

O, I go on through all the day,  
And only hope at night,  
That I may slip out silently  
Without a sup or bite,

That I may find you in the dark,  
Wherein you will not see  
The angry red that rims my eyes  
And burns them bitterly.



You have not felt what I have felt;  
This only you have known  
That it is sweet to walk with me  
In the dark fields alone.

You only hear me speak of love  
And you have never heard  
My father's thin and grumbling voice,  
My mother's heavy word.

Yet, ah, the most I know of you  
Is nothing more than this  
That when the painful day is done  
Your lips are good to kiss.

## THE KING'S DANCER

*To Charles Winzer*

It was the King of the East, they say, who bought  
A slave girl in the market of Bagdad;  
The merchants brought her thither, travelling  
A long way southward, from the wrinkled hills  
Of Georgia and sold her for a price.

It was the king who saw her, as he passed  
At midday through the hot and narrow streets,  
And asked what sum they set on her. They told  
him.

He bade his purse-bearer count out the coins  
And bring her home. But when he saw her first  
Among the fountains and the misty leaves  
In the cool garden of his golden house,  
He loved her.

She would dance for his delight  
And when she entertained him thus, he stared,  
Stupid with pleasure. She was young and nimble,  
With subtly moving wrists of ivory  
And ankles finer and stronger than graven steel.  
She was the blossoming bough that stirs in spring,  
The pearl-white clouds that drift across blue  
heaven,

The rainbowed wave that dies in colour on  
A sunny shore, the wheeling flight of birds

Hardly descried against a dusky wood,  
The arrowy darting fish in quiet brooks;  
All the earth's myriad movements lay in her.  
The king sat in his jewelled seat and saw  
With deep, fixed eyes her motions flash and blend  
In convolutions of the astounding dance,  
And ever when she paused he signed her on,  
Silently staring.

She danced all through the night,  
Now in slow measure mimed the rising moon,  
And now in a frenzy of light and hurrying steps  
The scattered and stricken clouds that fly in shreds  
Across the face of the moon and are lost in night  
And die in bitter space for love of the moon.  
Still with his grave deep eyes the king applauded,  
Silently nodding, and when she paused for rest,  
He raised his great arm up and with hairy fingers  
Urged her to dancing. Dark lines beneath her  
eyes

And sharp lines at the corners of her mouth  
Grew as night grew and weariness invaded  
Even her limbs of pearl and steel. She wept  
Small and infrequent tears of pain, hard wrung  
From a brave heart and body. Still she danced  
And when dawn shot his blood-red flames across  
The shimmering fountain and drowned the garden  
in gold,  
She sank in a last, triumphant attitude,  
Her bosom open to the rising sun.

So the king loved her and he built for her  
A bright pavilion hidden in high trees  
And there at night he came to visit her,

Without his retinue. Two Nubian soldiers  
Alone attended him to ward away  
The attempts of the wicked, and remained on  
guard

While he was in. So when his pleasure bade,  
He came to her and watched her maddening dance  
Or took her on his knees and fondled her  
And praised her lovely body of pearl and steel  
With silent glances and silent straying hands,  
Her body that was, so often as she danced,  
A flickering flame, an insubstantial wreath  
Of linked movements.

But he came one night  
Through the black shadows of the mighty trees,  
Black and immense beneath the risen moon,  
Unseen, unheard. The negroes crept behind,  
Blotted in shade. He picked his way to the gate  
And through the filigree of coiled gold  
He saw her little garden full of light,  
Wherein she danced alone and not for him,  
But with her moonwhite arms to the risen moon  
She offered her beauty and her sacred steps.  
An hour he stood unmoving; an hour she moved  
In measures of unbelievable loveliness,  
A phantasy of night, the essential wraith  
Of the moon, as though the light that filled the  
garden

Were thicker at the centre and there took  
A bodily shape and grew to be a woman,  
That danced and danced for silence and the moon.

But when the light was gone, he turned away  
And sought his negroes in the deeper shadow.

They came to him, darkness in darkness disguised;  
He drew them close and spoke in a low still voice,  
And, pointing with his hand to the pavilion,  
Commanded: Let the woman's ankles be broken.

## HYMN TO DESIRE

*For Linda Chesterman*

Not only when thou art terrible, Desire,  
Do we acknowledge thine unshaken power;  
Thou liv'st not only in the raging fire,  
Thou liv'st as fully in the slightest flower.  
Now the moon fails, that radiant so long  
Rode the black, burnished levels of the night,  
Serene and lovely witness of delight;  
And now I catch my breath and hold my song,  
That cannot longer than the heaven be bright,  
For the faint clouds that now obscure the moon  
Darken my mind's serenity too soon.

Thus is it ever. Still the shade will creep  
On lovely things, who knoweth how or whence?  
Like quick dreams crowding in a healthy sleep,  
A sudden pulse, an urgent influence.  
Thus the light wrinkles on an azure pool  
Spread outward from the fall of one frail leaf,  
The first the tree weeps off for future grief,  
In the sad hour when summer's cup is full.  
Long move the waters, though the touch be  
brief,  
And break in shards that image of the sky  
They showed before in blue tranquillity.

Who knoweth how or whence desire will come,  
The wind that wakes the foam-line on the sea,  
That breathes new feeling into spirits numb  
To try again an exquisite agony?  
Maybe when in the idle world of men,  
We poise in words upon the perfect hour  
Or, lonely, stoop to touch a lonely flower,  
At the serenest point of noon or when  
A black cloud breaks into a silver shower;  
Out of all these and out of more than these  
The influence comes that shatters all our ease.

I too have prayed to feel desire no more,  
To find in little things a small content,  
No longer from the green and friendly shore  
To swim, a waif in the huge element.  
My spirit darkens, my heart beats fitfully;  
A power descends upon my soul that shakes  
The calm of tranquillising song and breaks  
The doom-dark wave of passion over me  
And every tumult in my being wakes;  
A power not friendly to me but divine  
Troubles the current of my trembling line.

In all the things we love the ambush lies  
And most of all in love. Who has not known  
Under the glance of the beloved's eyes  
How painfully his deep unrest has grown?  
Out of sweet things we would a refuge make,  
A certain harbour for the flying mind,  
Each worldly solace to our fortune bind,  
Comfort from love, counsel from friendship take;  
Yet in the roof and furnishings we find

## HYMN TO DESIRE

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Hid like a snake, whose fangs bear venomous fire,  
Thou hast thy secret shelter made, Desire!

O most of all in love! Contentment there  
Is but the single moment ere decay,  
Precursor of a long and dull despair,  
Frets the fruit's golden rind and flesh away.  
Some wear love's flower a day and see love go,  
Having been content; but they whose loves  
endure

Ache with an ill love has not strength to cure,  
Strive for perfection, stumble still and know  
Too well that love is ever insecure,  
That in the midst of pleasure hunger sits  
And feeds upon the tortured heart and wits.

Immortal agony! what canst thou be,  
If that thou be not the immortal spur  
Which, when we halt in sloth or luxury,  
We faint and failing mortals must incur?  
Thus comes the wind upon a mountain-lake  
That lay beneath the sun, serene and bland;  
And now at touch of the triumphant hand  
A thousand colours on the surface wake;  
The ripples move and curl from land to land  
And, while they struggle and the tyrant blows,  
The tumult of the sunlit water grows.

The faint clouds drift and drive across the moon,  
Veil and unveil her distant loveliness;  
The ecstasy will sink and leave me soon,  
Yet still the vague, bright intimations press



Remorselessly upon my flagging mind,  
And to these whips my shuddering flesh lies  
bare

And to these lights my aching eyeballs stare—  
I wince, my courage leaves me, I am blind!

O spare me utter death, but mostly spare  
The dull revengeful fire, the mocking prize  
Which in the heart of all fulfilment lies.

For all fulfilment let lament be made,  
Save for the pause and turning which is death;  
Weep for those spirits who on shows that fade  
And earthly copies waste their fitful breath,  
Forgetful of the far, ideal skies.

They know not how the awakened soul can be  
Borne above sorrow and felicity  
To hold brief converse thus with Paradise  
And catch the signals of eternity;  
They know not that desire is but a spray  
Thrown from the fountain of eternal day!

The moon is gone, the moon is down and dead;  
A last dull gleam in the horizon trees  
Bears witness to the glory that is shed;  
Now through the vacant sky a rambling breeze  
Murmurs invisibly. The wings now fail  
That bore aloft my struggling load of song.  
I faint, I falter. Be thou now not long,  
O sleep unwaked of owl or nightingale,  
Nor let not in on me the urgent throng  
Of dreams, but be thou full and calm and deep,  
For more than this I crave not, blessed sleep!

## A DIALOGUE

LONG have I striven and now am overwrought  
With sleepless nights and days whose blackened  
    suns  
Make pale my blood and drain my spirit of fire,  
Mine eyes of light

—But spring will come again.  
—But not again that old ideal spring,  
The essence of the Aprils that have been  
And live as memories. All that is lost;  
Now, even in my six and twentieth year,  
Like winter twilight in a little room,  
Over the wide expanse of wood and field,  
Slow darkness thickens in the room of the world,  
Which with the lamps of science and poetry  
I must illuminate as best I can.

—But there is life beyond this darkening life.  
Somewhere behind the narrow arch of blue  
Dwell the imaginable verities  
Which you have seen and whose remembered  
    forces

Draw your sick heart in longing from your breast.  
—They are there indeed but I am cast on earth.  
After how long and how headlong a fall  
I here reside! where there is nothing true  
But shadows and faint copies that suggest  
Dimly and brokenly the real world,

Whence we are exiled here. O, how can I  
See the truth shine beyond phantasmal shows  
And thin the splendour of the gorgeous earth,  
And still be glad for either?

—But your spirit  
Remembers yet the home from which you came  
And gives ideal beauty to the fragments  
And wreckage of this unpieced, fantastic life.  
—Would it were so! The world in which we live  
Was once my pleasure. Midday gleaming elms  
And silent oaks with brooding night in their  
boughs

And the low-chanting aspens and the holy  
Unreal thorn ablaze with silver flowers,  
Whether amid the odorous meadows set  
Or on the sides of smooth and lofty hills,  
Delighted me and then were nought but trees.  
The rayless blue of heavy August skies  
Pleased me, and the clouds that floated stiffly past  
Were solid toys that vision touched and played  
with.

I found my joy in beautiful forms and in  
The fresh and supple body of my young love,  
Her voice, her eyes, her arms about my neck,  
And in all girls that passed me in the streets,  
Light with the grace of youth and happy pride,  
In colours and music and the lovely words  
That then could bind my sorrows up with spells,  
Such sorrows as then I knew. But now through  
these

Shines the intolerable sum of truth,  
Gleams through the misty veil  
Of the word's beauty and makes poor and thin

This life's imperfect grace.

—Yet do you not

Strive for perfection still,  
Strain and glow warm in straining for the truth?  
Are not the joys you had from earthly things  
Transformed by musing on the original?

—Would it were so!

—Yet have you no inner faith

That from the mist of delusion you will at length  
Emerge and move about the real world?

—Thence have I fallen far and farther fall  
Headlong in ruin through these empty cheats.

Why should I hope (since hope is also a cheat)  
Ever to find again that tangled way

I followed hither from eternity?  
Still through the waste of dark and whirling time,

Through shadowed years and sombre centuries,  
My spirit goes, like a lost child in a wood,

Crying for home amid the unfriendly boughs  
And straying further from the invisible road.

## COLD

THE hard snow lies upon the hard round hills;  
Unbroken silence fills  
The empty valleys, and the unmoving air  
Is thickened by the cold. The northward plain  
Under a haze lies bleak and brown and bare,  
Untouched by snow, and, at its westerly rim,  
Loom dark and dim  
The Malverns on the mist like a huge stain.

Turn, turn again  
From that wet country to the snowy hills,  
Where coldly in its silence the frost fills  
The deep and rounded valleys with a fine  
Jewel of air made crystalline.  
The cold has frozen the air, the air's a gem,  
Bright as a diamond filled with frozen light,  
From the hill-tops down to the plain's wet hem,  
Hard, yet clear to the sight.  
Move not—we cannot move, we are prisoners,  
Like that old traveller whom a later found  
Within a shining ice-block straitly bound,  
Staring immovably two hundred years  
Across the waste, white ground.

## MID-WINTER

WINTER hems us round;  
A powder of dry snow lies lightly on the ground;  
The cold stings our flesh and our hearts, perhaps,  
as well;  
Every faintest sound  
Jars the quiet air like a harshly shaken bell.

The turning of the year  
Was done a week ago, yet no light doth appear  
And still the long nights eat the comfort-giving  
day.  
Warmth draws not near;  
Not long enough to hearten us the sun doth stay.

Gentle, gentle sun,  
Be our friend as of old for one day, only one.  
Breathe deceitful life into us and everything,  
Before happiness is done,  
The happiness we need for the long months till  
spring.

## COLD

THE hard snow lies upon the hard round hills;  
Unbroken silence fills  
The empty valleys, and the unmoving air  
Is thickened by the cold. The northward plain  
Under a haze lies bleak and brown and bare,  
Untouched by snow, and, at its westerly rim,  
Loom dark and dim  
The Malverns on the mist like a huge stain.

Turn, turn again  
From that wet country to the snowy hills,  
Where coldly in its silence the frost fills  
The deep and rounded valleys with a fine  
Jewel of air made crystalline.  
The cold has frozen the air, the air's a gem,  
Bright as a diamond filled with frozen light,  
From the hill-tops down to the plain's wet hem,  
Hard, yet clear to the sight.  
Move not—we cannot move, we are prisoners,  
Like that old traveller whom a later found  
Within a shining ice-block straitly bound,  
Staring immovably two hundred years  
Across the waste, white ground.

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## THE FIRELESS TOWN

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BENEATH a rising wood there was a town  
That had in ancient times its own renown,  
For in a valley rich and warm it lay  
And there through interwoven boughs the day  
Came softly stealing and burning brighter, till  
The broad sun rose above the topmost hill.  
A long way west, the broad and level plains,  
White with the dew or filled with morning rains,  
Stirred in the dawn and shook a myriad leaves  
Over the flanks of silky-coated beeves,  
And there great fields of green or yellow corn  
With lifting heads the seasons did adorn,  
While acres much more odorous lay between,  
Bee-pleasing clover and the scented bean,  
And orchards, where long loaded boughs hung  
down,  
Parted the open country and the town.  
It was a portly place, because therein  
A many merchants mighty gain did win  
By bartering the farmers' rich increase,  
Or wool much wealthier than the Golden Fleece,  
Wherewith they built great halls of yellow stone  
And set tall windowed gables thereupon  
And hoarded in their houses gold and gem  
... and silver vessels. One of them

In beauty blest and maiden innocencies.  
Her name was Helen and her heart was proud,  
For though much loved she had not loved nor  
    bowed  
To be a toy of any man or hear  
Love's subtle offers urged by any whisperer.  
Yet in the flesh she was divinely made;  
Her honey-shining hair in heavy braid  
Clung round her temples, as the sunset lies  
On snowy mountain ridges, and her eyes  
Burnt like the heaven's warm and candid gray  
When August spends in fire his dreamy day;  
Straight as an arrow, as a birch-tree tall,  
Where maidens met she overcame them all.  
So she was made; but how she looked and moved  
Could not be told by them that most her loved.  
They watched her with the young girls, when she  
    came  
And danced with them, a light and errant flame,  
Cool fire that flickered and was not consumed  
But burnt more radiant as the dark trees gloomed  
With drooping night. They worshipped her when  
    she  
Advanced her narrow ankles delicately  
Or turned on flashing heels or quickly span  
Around the ring with light skirts swaying as she  
    ran.  
When she was walking, it was strange how went  
Her nimble pace upon the pavèment,  
How easily she climbed the steepest hill  
And laughed upon the crest, untroubled still;  
She spoke as though a nightingale had rested  
Within her rising bosom and there nested,

Contented with one climate all the year,  
Where every morning still gay summer did appear.  
In many suitors found she lovers none:  
Of all that prayed to her she chose not one.  
At nightfall by the lantern light she stayed  
While her companions of the sun delayed  
With other friends to saunter in the wood  
So softly that the light awakened brood  
Of crying birds that harboured there slept on  
Nor knew what hid, delightful things were done,  
What gifts refused and what at last were given,  
Beneath the friendly, close and leaf-embroidered  
heaven.

Some maidens came back silently and some  
Loud in their joy along the dark streets home  
And some came weeping; but ere all were come  
Helen slept dreamless in her narrow bed,  
Her body lying straight, her quiet head  
Still on the pillow and her quiet eyes  
Peacefully rid of day's quick vanities.  
Though all men praised, her father praised her  
more

Because he slept at night with unlocked door,  
Unshuttered windows and a heart at rest,  
While all his fellows at the inn confessed  
That bars and bolts must keep their daughters in  
And roving dishonour from the anxious kin.  
Young men reviled what gave him quiet blood;  
Pale were their sullen faces; who had stood  
All night beneath her window, that all night  
Denied the least reply of flattering light,  
Grated no sound, however harsh or small,  
But blindly stared and answered not at all.

They lingered in the dark and Helen lay  
Unmoved in careless sleep until the day  
Despatched them hollow-eyed and unappeased  
away;

She rose alone, even as alone they slept,  
Nor knew what thankless vigil had been kept.  
Proud was the fortress, strong the citadel,  
Jealous the girl and kept her treasure well,  
But thorniest flowers are pulled and even the  
fortress fell.

At that time in the town the custom was  
Early on May Day through the gate to pass,  
Maidens and youths in amity together,  
To go upon the hill-side and to gather  
Dew-heavy may and what else flowers might be  
Hidden in brakes or flaunting on the tree.  
With these they hung the houses and the day  
Was spent in country feasting and in play,  
Hiding and Seeking, Kissing in a Ring,  
Here is a Thing and a Very Pretty Thing,  
Or Who's Your True Love Now? And when they  
played

At suchlike pastimes, every holdback maid  
Blushed but grew kinder and grew rosy warm  
And sighing leaned upon her lover's arm;  
All but the proudest beauty must relent  
And yield herself in fee of that day's merriment.  
But the expected hour, which all the year  
Lit Helen's lovers like a beacon clear,  
Found her so chilly yet that she went out  
Unpartnered in the happy pairing rout  
Or kept a girl on either side of her,

Or mixed so gaily in the march and stir  
That none of the young men could find a place  
To be sole gazer on her laughing face,  
To speak aside with her in trembling tones  
Or dare for love what only love condones,  
The lawless hand's caress or wanton speeches,  
Wherewith the suitor claims what he beseeches.  
They went out singing through the portal wide  
And past the runnel at the meadow-side,  
The mill-wheel's clean and bubbling freshet, where  
Long water-weeds hung out their trailing hair,  
Past the deep mill-pool, green and dark and still,  
That threw them back their pictures, past the mill  
And up the lane, where first the climb began  
And down the chalky ruts clear gushes ran.  
Now by the roadside came the shining water,  
Now went from hedge to hedge with muffled  
laughter

And spread across the path and stopped the way;  
Then there was mocking and assumed dismay,  
And lifted skirts and fearful steps, and some  
Were borne across but Helen would not come  
A gift to any helping arm. She leapt  
As lightly over as the young men stepped,  
Standing a moment poised upon the edge.  
Have you not seen, upon the grassy ledge  
Beside a pool, a slender lily swaying  
At every turn of wind and each obeying,  
As though in mind to leap it? Thus she stood  
Under the first green shadows of the wood.

But now through scattered trees and luminous  
shade

Of lighter leaves they saw the open glade  
Upon the hill-top, where light harebells grew  
Flecking the open turf with airy blue.  
The troop dispersed and running up and down  
Broke boughs and gathered flowers to hang the  
town;

These in their baskets garnered violets new  
And fresh anemones that sparkle through  
The wood's light shade and glimmer in green air,  
Those threaded daisies or on darkest hair  
Laid garlands of the azure bells that fade  
And still refuse to be light trophies made  
Or grace a dwelling or exist an hour  
On maiden bosoms sweeter than the flower,  
But sink in death away and cheat the stronger  
power.

Now Helen laid smooth hands upon a branch  
That broke and hid her in an avalanche  
Of trembling green and red. She tossed away  
To waiting lads the mute and captive spray  
And went where blossoms of the starry white  
Nodding in careless liberty upright  
Presumed to mock upon the neighbouring red  
That still they lifted an unconquered head.  
These made her helpless prisoners, soon she went  
Deep to the knees in the green wonderment  
That bordered all the wood and there she found  
In folds and hollows of the broken ground  
By lustrous settlements and colonies  
The misty milkmaids and sunny primroses;  
All these she plucked and could not have enough  
But filled her skirts with bales of shining stuff.  
However long and willingly they toiled,

Yet would these treasures not have been despoiled,  
Though they had harvested till odorous night  
And sought for shutting blooms by glow-worm  
light;

But now the sun, well risen in the sky,  
Shone on the osier baskets trembling high  
And bade them homeward. So they took the way,  
Mindful what yet was due of mirth and play;  
And as they travelled happy songs were sung,  
Maidens and men in company, all young,  
All that brave youth together, all the young!

How excellent is youth and April blood,  
That is by every diverse fancy wooed  
And moves as easily and merrily  
As April breezes in a hawthorn-tree!  
How good youth found that day to love devoted,  
Well in his calendar with red marks noted,  
A stage of time, a milestone in the year,  
Whereby nought sad or evil came anear  
But only careless joy and joyous things,  
Events of mark and golden happenings!  
Yet in the town was one with whom the day  
Unnoticed and unhonoured burnt away,  
Who lay so deep in dusty dreams and care  
He had not known that May's first dawn was there.  
Young Michael, for his woe, inherited  
Strange figured folios from his father dead,  
That set him seeking for a dismal truth  
And cast a shadow early on his youth;  
For though not thirty of his years were done  
He lived and worked and ate and slept alone,  
Renouncing every sweet companionship



And every bond of heart and hand and lip  
For those uncouth and more than doubtful spells,  
Whereof he sought to tame the obstinate syllables.  
Long he would sit with painful, swimming eyes  
On herbals and black-letter mysteries,  
Or drowse himself in black and sleepy smoke  
From crystal crucibles, whence he awoke  
With aching forehead and with trembling limbs,  
Searching the lore that swelled the unholy  
seraphims.

Outside his window grew a little tree  
That was not propped or pruned but, blossoming  
free,

Knocked all that morning on the dusty pane  
Its dear beseeching flowers to him in vain.  
He saw it not and even smelt it not  
But plunged in thornier thickets of dark thought  
Pursued in heat through mental bog and briar  
A phantom quarry, a Jack o' Lantern fire,  
Soiling in those foul roads his youthful spirit  
To gain a doubtful prize of little merit.  
When noon with burning hand was come and gone  
And lower stooped and lower the unhasting sun  
In regular departure and the day  
Fruitless for him had almost passed away,  
Slant through his window came a radiance  
That flickered on his books in careless dance,  
Dazzling his eyes and teaching novel lust  
For pastime to the gray and learned dust.  
He laid aside the worm-worn manuscript,  
Whence bitter honey painfully he sipped,  
Marking his place with blackened finger. Still!  
What music ranted from the distant hill

And moved the valley air to murmur sweet,  
Breathing unwonted perfume in the street,  
As though a golden light a golden sound should  
meet

And marry their vibrations in the air,  
Nor light nor sound, but like the lucky pair,  
Salmacis and her lover, joined to grow more fair!  
That music filled his heart with new unease;  
Gazing he saw amid the lower trees  
With unbelieving eyes a happy throng,  
That ran downhill in exultation strong,  
Holding aloft great branches of the may  
And casting countless blossoms by the way.  
Still as he gazed they grew; no more they seemed  
Fantastic shapes at drowsy midnight dreamed  
But breathing flesh of mortal excellence  
And bodies to be seized by human sense.  
Michael awoke; the new blood in his veins  
Roused, like the gush of early summer rains,  
A thirsty channel into busy growth  
Till blossoming joy took root in obscure sloth  
And green and burgeoning desires arose,  
Sweet as the rose and thornier than the rose!  
A day will come in studious life, when he  
Who pawns youth's heritage for the rusty key  
To chambers full of learning's grimy treasure  
Pauses and longs to know a cleaner pleasure;  
So Michael found in half a moment's time  
That all his empty years were out of rhyme  
With his green age, and widowed of delight  
His tedious day and single pillowed night.  
Then in a trance he stood and wondering  
Heard nearer to his house again the maidens sing,

Whereat his senses started and he knew  
What to his five and twenty years was due  
That yet was never paid. He cast adown  
Book, crucible and tattered magic gown  
And ran into the street with eyes aflame  
As on their road the May Day revellers came,  
Flushed with the spoil and treasure of the year  
And crowned and garlanded with scented gear.  
They checked their onward course and stared at  
him,

Being so light and gay and he so grim;  
He seemed with inky hands and matted curls  
A gnarled tree in a field of flowerlike girls,  
A shaggy comet in a starry night,  
So blazed his eyes and so his hair upright  
Circled his head with dark and waving flame  
So dusky red he grew in diffidence and shame.  
They swirled in stream about, but Helen stayed  
Under his glance, erect and unafraid,  
And seeing her, he thought that he could see  
His fortune in her bright proximity,  
All kindliness and innocence and truth  
And all the comeliness of living youth.  
She laughed at him: O Michael—for your name  
I know, and something of your dusty fame—  
Will you come with us till the day be spent?  
But hearing her so light and insolent,  
He felt a strange unrest, a foolish fire  
Light in his heart's tough wood and rise and twine,  
Flickering in the tempest of his blood  
But burning still the hard and stubborn wood,  
Till longing made a fury of sparks and heat  
That blinded him and, swaying on his feet,

He kissed her mouth and broke in panic away  
With eyes of fear and breathing of dismay.  
She panted too; the rest were silent, till  
A girl behind sent up a mocking trill  
Of thin clear laughter and all their laughter broke,  
Louder and louder. He woke and Helen woke;  
He was dying back from frenzy and she stood  
Whitefaced in anger but with troubled blood;  
He stammered, she said nought. Then at the last  
The youths behind were eager to be past  
And pushed their careless way by Michael's house,  
Leaving him staring and inglorious,  
Forgetful of the studies that had been  
So long his spirit's solely loved demesne,  
His precious drops and powders and the fume  
That still with hard, stale odour filled his room.  
Therein he now amazed in drowsy fit  
Sought to bring back to hand his wayward wit,  
That journeyed in a new and cloudier clime,  
As though by drugs translated, whither time  
Will years upon the perfect minute stay  
Or cram a coloured lifetime in a day.  
Long there he sat in revery and long  
Sought to forget he had heard any song,  
So all might be as erst, but found the charm too  
strong.

Meanwhile the gay, vociferous multitude  
Awoke the town with clamorous prelude;  
Joy's drums in all the ardent voices rolled  
And echoed deafening from the houses cold;  
The tall and silent elm-trees on the green,  
That edged the street, bowed loftily their serene

Great heads, and yews in gardens walled around  
Shook stiffly but responsive to the sound.  
Then all the houses woke and doors were thrown  
Wide open, that the music might be blown  
Through the low rooms and cool wide passages  
To leave behind a sweet and subtle trace  
In faint-flowered curtains and old padded chairs  
And, lingering at the dark turn of the stairs  
Where children falter going up to bed,  
Endure with homely scent to ease their dread.  
The town took back its youth again, as though  
A golden river on gray sand should flow  
And drew them here and there and parcelled out  
In house and church and hall the laden rout  
To strew their gifts. And now the happy night  
Drew near to them already, vaguely bright,  
With longed-for victories and promised joys,  
That morning pledged amid the sun and noise,  
In darkness and in silence to be fulfilled,  
When the lanterns paled and the loud pipes were  
stilled.

But Helen was not with them. In her room,  
Close curtains drawn, she brooded in the gloom  
That could alone her angry roses hide  
Or the white blossoms of her shaken pride,  
And where unheard she could both sigh and weep,  
Thinking by this to lull her shame to sleep.  
But all in vain, since she could not forget  
What had been seen of all, the kiss that yet  
Burnt on her pallid mouth and printed there  
A stain that weeping could not all outwear.  
So from her sighing she at last arose:

Again upon her cheeks the insulted rose  
Burst into strange and sudden blossoming,  
And now her anger spread a rapid wing.  
This is the tale of smutchèd innocence,  
That, whatsoe'er the injury or whence,  
She half detects a felon in her breast,  
And deems her enemy the fault hath guessed  
And so, twice angered and with double fire,  
Rebukes in him her own, her traitorous desire.  
Her lamp, being lit, gave her no comfort new,  
But shone too clearly out and sent all through  
The shadows of her small and quiet room  
A tempered radiance and a golden gloom  
That, falling on her fingers, let her see  
How, clenched and tight, they trembled piteously.  
Ask not how she, being gentle and so young,  
Could in her virgin thoughts have that among  
Which now she fostered to a bitter fruit,  
For shame in honest minds is oft the root  
Of evil things. Who knows what storms they are  
That blot out suddenly the sailor's star  
Of peace to his own soul? They rise unbidden  
From distant seas and icy mountains hidden  
Far off in lands untraversed. Reason then  
Drives blindly on till calm returns again,  
Nor guesses whither but despairingly  
Gives up the rudder to the tyrant sea  
And shuddering hears the hard-tried timbers  
start

In that fine ship she navigates—the heart.  
So, anger being master, Helen took  
The yellow flyleaf of an ancient book  
And wrote in haste what words she had to write,

Nor would not read them through but quickly  
doused the light,  
And ran with panting bosom down the stair  
To find unseen her chosen messenger.  
She sent him off and fled in haste again  
To hide from all her mingled fear and pain  
And to determine, if much brooding might,  
What end should come at last to that eventful  
night.

A garden underneath her window lay  
That in the cool and breathless end of day  
Sent up sharp perfumes climbing to her sill  
To take the shadowy air by waves and fill  
Her room with ghosts of flowers. The lane below  
Lay empty, but the town was louder now  
With silver quiring and with wanton cries,  
That ever in a maddening strain would rise,  
Clearer and stronger, till the troubled air  
Streamed in a turmoil and the lights aglare  
Laid out before the gust their long and tossing hair.  
All this she heard and saw, and she could see  
Her young companions go by two and three  
Across the lane's dark entry, where the grass  
Grew in the flags, whereat a faint: Alas!  
Rose in her bosom, neither willed nor owned,  
But still by hotter spite to be atoned.  
And yet the lane below unvisited  
Lay silent till the quick, triumphant tread  
Of Michael sounded there, whose happy eyes  
Looked upward in assured lover's guise.  
For him her messenger had found alone,  
Drowsing in dulness, by his black hearthstone,  
And given him her letter, which, being read,

Set the swift blood aspinning in his head.  
Then he had risen and with care had dressed,  
And niceness, that the beating heart confessed,  
And gone to keep the tryst, as fine as one  
Could be who never yet on love's wild ways had  
run.

He passed amid the gay and careless crowd,  
As little noticed as a midnight cloud,  
And heard no syllable of all their song  
That shook the dusky trees and died in long  
Reverberations down the alleys deep  
Where workday tools forgotten lay asleep;  
He passed the lighted windows where the old  
Amused the night with stories manifold  
And bragging legends of their days of gold;  
He passed young daring girls, who mocked him  
after

And loosed light arrows from the bow of laughter;  
He passed them in a lonely happiness  
And turned into the dark lane's quiet recess.  
Then Helen waiting saw him come, and set  
A candle in her window. Through the wet  
And odorous hedge, he ran towards the sign,  
Coming out wreathed with tangled trail and vine,  
Convolvulus and creeping briony,  
And stood before her garlanded. But she  
Leant down to him and whispered through the still  
Sharp-scented air that lay upon her sill  
A word of honeyed consequence, wherein  
His name afloat, like flowers in heady wine  
Enchanted him to stammering and threw  
His sense unguarded from the level true.  
How shall I come to you, sweet love? he cried.



But she with finger on her lip replied:  
Hush! for the night is young and all awake,  
And none must know how we our secret pleasure  
take.

What should I do if any found you here?  
You are too loud a lover. O, I fear  
Lest in your eagerness you should proclaim  
To all at once your triumph and my shame;  
In silence take what secretly is given,  
Nor shout your victory to the listening heaven,  
But breathe it on my breast and I shall hear  
What could not be so sweet cried in the loud mob's  
ear.

How shall I come to you, he cried again,  
Softer, since love in him did love restrain,  
Whereto she answered: You shall say, not I;  
Can wizards not by incantation fly  
Astride a slip of thorn? But in despair  
He raised his wild arms up and said to her:  
My craft avails me not, for I have learnt  
No gallant's tricks like these. I never burnt  
Till now to climb a maiden's window nor  
Studied the cantraps some have made therefor.  
What shall I do? Must we the whole night long  
Gaze at a distance? Surely I am strong  
And I will climb to you or find a way. . . .  
He ceased and no word further could he say,  
Being by love made dumb and made a fool,  
Such as he is who is just escaped from wisdom's  
rule.

But while in misery his body shook  
Helen adjured him with a merry look  
And said she had not brought him there in vain

To see her window and go home again,  
And thereupon let down to him a great  
Basket, that had through half the year for freight  
The wizened winter-apples, packed away  
And growing sweeter and fewer every day,  
But now must hold a heavier load instead,  
A lover going to a lawless bed.  
I'll draw you up in this, she breathed; but he  
Looked at the height and stood uncertainly  
Doubting her strength, until she laughed again:  
Love pulls the rope with me and halves the pain,  
And night is wasting, Michael, and I have made  
An easy pulley for my better aid.  
Come, if you truly love me! He thereat  
Hastily in the swinging basket sat,  
And as she drew he dug his nails between  
The wall's great stones a little way to win,  
And as she laboured he bore double strain  
Till all his muscles ached with twice her pain,  
And double agony his heart possessed  
To hear the loud breath in her toiling breast  
And think that she should stiffen every limb  
And tax her blood to give herself to him.

Much ere he came in thoughts that hurried past,  
She mused what she must do with him at last,  
And in perplexity had put aside  
Her many plans for taking down his pride  
And still had made no plan; but when he came  
So close to her, his eyes revived her shame  
And sent new anger running in her breast,  
For now his foolish heart, by hope caressed,  
Moved him to praise her in a voice that shook

And stare on her with so possessive look  
And glance so greedy and assured that he  
Burnt up at once her doubtful leniency.  
Are you spent, love? he asked her, being aware  
That now the basket rocked in middle air,  
Tie up the rope and rest. But she replied:  
Rest easy, Michael, for the rope is tied  
And we are safe together, you and I.  
Therewith, into the room's obscurity,  
She disappeared and silence settled down  
On that one alley in the noisy town.  
When she had gone, he lay awhile at ease,  
Whispering fondly inward foolishness,  
How lovely she was, how made for him to adore  
With that young heart which never loved before,  
How high a spirit and what a gallant fire  
Had leapt impetuous to his desire,  
How her mind marched with his against delay  
And tumbled all the barriers from the way!  
He sighed in the darkness, smiled and was content,  
Nor cared at first how long the minutes went  
Brushing his face with slow, enchanted wings  
And filling his mind with magical new things,  
He lay so close to all he coveted  
That love cried truce and reason, lightly sped,  
Entered upon a new and drowsy reign,  
Wherein there was no movement nor no pain,  
But honeyed longing that without a smart  
Brims up the intricate vessel of the heart,  
And promised happiness that lightlier lies  
Than rose-petals on the most burning eyes.  
Long he lay motionless in such a trance,  
But acrid fire began again to advance

And stung him, that he had not heard above  
A new beginning of the toils of love  
Nor words of joy nor any promises,  
Which as the gift itself the unpractised lover  
    please.

Then in that stillness fear got room to throw  
A panic in his heart and check the flow  
Of the delighted blood; one dark thought sped  
From heart to hands: What if the girl were dead,  
Slain by the labour that for love she bore?  
Michael leapt up; the basket trembled sore,  
Yet sorer shook his limbs, and as he stared,  
Darkness replied above and he despaired.

While thus he languished in his bitterness  
Behind his back a murmur 'gan to press  
From the singing far away, towards the lane,  
Strayed echoes of the festival refrain  
That louder grew until the very sound  
Did from the high and shadowy walls rebound  
And wake him from the stupor, so that he  
Turning beheld the alley suddenly  
Filled with a shouting mob, whose torches flung  
Light in the dark air, where amazed he hung,  
And in whose web of interwoven noise  
He heard first one and then another voice,  
That cried his name aloud and bade him climb  
The further way nor longer wait on time  
But of himself to assure felicity.  
Then, at the cawing of that rookery,  
Blood filled his splitting brain, his burning eyes  
Darkened and swelled, he felt his arteries  
Straining and giving and his hands clenched tight

Upon the swaying rope. But still the light  
Derisive uproar pleased itself below,  
Numbing his brain in his pride's overthrow,  
He would have fled them, but he could not flee,  
Would have ignored them, yet could not but  
see,

Till at the last anger possessed him too  
And pride returned and courage from them grew,  
And, turning on the crowd, he would have spoken  
But by the noise beneath his words were broken,  
Thrown high and scattered in the silent night  
That lay acalm above the crowd's delight.  
Silence! he cried again. His mockers still  
Derided him, men loud and women shrill,  
But the third time he used such vehemence,  
Such thunder in his voice and so immense  
A gesture of his spread and threatening hand,  
That all grew quieter, as the poplars stand  
Whispering between the onslaughts of the storm,  
And stared like fools upon his swaying form.  
Then in that silence mightily he said:  
I will be gentle, though about my head  
Your brutal mockeries spin and though I see  
The trick the wanton girl has played on me.  
I will be gentle. Helen! make an end,  
Lest I should do what you can never mend,  
Free me and let me down. A quietness fell,  
Wherein the trees' low sigh was audible  
And nothing else. He heard no sound above,  
No sign of her repentance or her love;  
The rope hung still and taut. But now beneath,  
First came a whisper, then a rising breath,  
And lastly uproar, wherein no word was,

But as the wind and wave contend in tongueless  
cause.

But that great crying fell as it began;  
From group to yelling group a silence ran  
And laid a finger on the mouths that cried  
Till in low murmurings the tumult died  
And Michael spoke again, slow, heavy words,  
That floated through the hush like ominous birds.  
I have not learnt, he said, the trivial spell  
That can a woman's mutinous heart compel.  
But I who am weak in dealing with desire  
Can yet constrain earth, water, air and fire,  
And, for this town hath mocked me and since one  
Hath hurt me closer than all your taunts have done,  
I make return! Henceforth no fire shall live  
Within your houses and the fugitive  
Light flame that dances in your lanterns shall  
To blackened nothing in an instant fall.  
You elements, with whom I dwelt at ease,  
Come to my aid, confound mine enemies!  
Out, friendly light and warmth! Out, every flame!  
Back to the yokeless aether whence ye came!

Thereon a strange and dizzying thing befell  
For, quicker than the magic takes to tell,  
While still they gaped, they suddenly were aware  
How from their torches into the still air  
The bright fire slipped and instantly was gone,  
Like burning-plumaged coveys, journeying on  
From human haunts to fabled Araby.  
They gazed about and everywhere could see  
The shining casements blackened and gone blind,  
And in that lightless waste no man could find

His neighbour or his friend. Then down they  
threw

Their useless lanterns and the panic grew;  
The weaker cried and wailed with piteous voice  
And the dark lane re-echoed with the noise  
Of broken men and women, whose dismay  
Spared not each other as they fled away  
From Michael's wrath and left him hanging there.  
And now, with dreadful whisperings, despair  
Ran through the town, as erst the darkness ran,  
And laid on every house its gloomy ban;  
Flint lost its virtue and the friendly flame  
Lay in the pebble whence before it came;  
There was no moon, the stars were faint and few  
And still the dreadful night was hardly half-way  
through.

Then in a pitiful agony hurried all  
To that dark shadow hanging on the wall  
And begged with breaking voices and loud sighs  
That he would turn on them compassionate eyes  
And give them back again their patron, flame.  
They knelt to him and prayed and felt no shame,  
And sobbed and stormed at him in unison:  
But when their maudlin beggary was done,  
He answered coldly: What you now entreat  
Cheaply you valued, when you deemed it meet  
To mock one greater than your hearts have known.  
Suffer together now, as I alone,  
And have the heart to be as silent as I,  
Lest I should turn on you my mockery.  
They answered him: We are humble, we are  
broken,

We kneel to you and offer you as token  
Our outstretched hands and bended heads and ask  
That you will set on us some heavy task  
To prove our single heart. But he replied:  
Were I to yield, your tears would not be dried,  
The dust be hardly scattered from your knees  
Ere you would charm away your promises  
More easily than I your lanterns quelled.  
A deep low groan from all that concourse welled  
And sank again in harsh and sullen sound,  
Like lost winds on a waste and barren ground.  
Dumbly they waited; silently he stood,  
Raised as a judge upon that multitude;  
Sound slept and time stood still; neither he nor they  
Knew how far night had gone along her way  
Before he spoke again: O little creatures,  
That dare not face the night, without all nature's  
Coddling and cherishing and friendliness  
But catch affrighted at her swinging dress  
For warmth and shelter and as little know  
Herself as the dumb beasts that creeping go,  
I'll stand no more between you and your nurse;  
A little thing shall take away my curse.  
When I have ended what is here begun  
And my long journey up the wall is done,  
And I have taken what is promised me,  
Once more in torch and lantern burning free  
The gallant flame shall scare this cold inanity!  
All shuddered and none spoke; their whispering  
Moved in the darkness like a living thing,  
A tense and deeply breathing animal  
That could through tight and trembling bodies  
crawl



And draw existence from their agony.  
From no man's throat, and yet from all, a cry  
Rose thinly up and offered him his will  
With their submission. But he heard them still  
With scorn and answered not. And Helen lying  
Hid in her chamber mused upon that crying,  
How once these maddened men were hers to rule  
And each before her stood an equal fool,  
Stammered when she spoke and simpered at her  
smile

And sought with tedious homage to beguile  
Her heart impregnable. She could not hear  
Their vows below for cold and sickening fear  
That drowned her spirit, yet, in that forlorn  
Deep night, a sudden doubtful star was born,  
A flickering spark she scarcely could descry  
That moved and winked and cheated still her eye,  
And yet at last, the more she thought thereon,  
With steady and with friendly radiance shone;  
For she imagined in that dreadful hour  
An iron courage and a golden power  
And Michael standing over all the crowd,  
Strong as they weak and quiet as they loud.  
She saw nought else but this; she did not see  
A trembling and a ruffian two or three  
That came to draw the too long idle rope  
And grin at her from time to time, in hope  
Through the thick shade to see her blushing deep  
Or hear her praying them or hear her weep.  
Her thoughts were what the tree's are, when the  
wind  
Strips the light petals off and leaves the fruit  
behind.

Outside they saw with hot and staring eyes  
Slow in the dark the heavy basket rise  
And saw a shadow from the shadow climb  
And slip into the casement. Tardy time  
Stood still again and so immense a hush  
Reigned in the town that an uneasy bush  
Rubbing its boughs together seemed as though  
A mighty storm in mighty trees did blow;  
So long the moment was that men believed  
Night's cog was slipped or time's old hour-glass  
thieved,

That day's sweet advent was for ever past  
And that the rolling world was stayed at last.  
Then one cried: Look! and all together cried,  
For this man in his lantern light had spied  
And that had seen a blackened kitchen-fire  
Glow faintly into crimson and expire  
And glow again. Then in a rush of light  
The gabled houses stood out tall and bright,  
Lit by a lucid flood that overshone  
All that the human eye can gaze upon,  
Nor could they lift their lids again to see  
Until it sank in peaceful radiancy.  
And then a glow ineffably serene,  
Sleeping on every torch and wick was seen,  
A friendly light, so friendly, that a strange  
Beatitude, a soft and melting change,  
Soothed the wild heart and filled the uneasy breast  
With golden hopes of joy and silver hopes of rest.

FÊTE GALANTE:  
THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

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ARISTONOË, the fading shepherdess,  
Gathers the young girls round her in a ring,  
Teaching them wisdom of love,  
What to say, how to dress,  
How frown, how smile,  
How suitors to their dancing feet to bring,  
How in mere walking to beguile,  
What words cunningly said in what a way  
Will draw man's busy fancy astray,  
All the alphabet, grammar and syntax of love.

The garden smells are sweet,  
Daisies spring in the turf under the high-heeled  
feet,  
Dense, dark banks of laurel grow  
Behind the wavering row  
Of golden, flaxen, black, brown, auburn heads,  
Behind the light and shimmering dresses  
Of these unreal, modern shepherdesses;  
And gaudy flowers in formal patterned beds  
Vary the dim long vistas of the park,  
Far as the eye can see,  
Till at the forest's edge the ground *grows dim*  
And the flowers vanish in the *obscurity*.

The young girls gather round her,  
Remembering eagerly how their fathers found her  
Fresh as a spring-like wind in February,  
Subtler in her moving heart than sun-motes that  
vary

At every waft of an opening and shutting door;  
They gathering chattering near,  
Hush, break out in laughter, whisper aside,  
Grow silent more and more,  
Though she will never chide.  
Now through the silence sounds her voice still  
clear,  
And all give ear.

Like a silver thread through the golden afternoon,  
Equally the voice discloses  
All that age-old wisdom; like an endless tune  
Aristonoë's voice wavers among the roses,  
Level and unimpassioned,  
Telling them how of nothing love is fashioned,  
How it is but a movement of the mind,  
Bidding Celia mark  
That light skirts fluttering in the wind  
Or white flowers stuck in dark,  
Glistening hair have fired the dull beholder  
Or telling Anais  
That faint indifference ere now hath bred a kiss  
Denied to flaunted snowy breast or shoulder.

The girls attend,  
Each thinking on her friend,  
Whether he be real or imaginary,  
Whether he be loving or cold,

For each ere she grows old  
Means to pursue her joy and the whole unwary  
Troop of their wishes has this wild quarry in cry,  
That draws them ineluctably,  
More and more as the summer slippeth by.  
And Celia leans aside  
To contemplate her black-silked ankle on the  
grass;  
In remote dreaming pride  
Rosalind recalls the image in her glass.  
Phyllis through all her body feels  
How divine energy steals,  
Quiescent power and resting speed,  
Stretches her arms out, feels the warm blood run  
Ready for pursuit, for strife and deed,  
And turns her glowing face up to the sun.  
Phyllida smiles  
And lazily trusts her lazy wit,  
A slow arrow that hath often hit;  
Chloe, bemused by many subtle wiles,  
Grows not more dangerous for all of it.  
But opens her red lips, yawning drowsily,  
And shows her small white teeth,  
Dimpling the round chin beneath,  
And stretches, moving her young body deliciously.  
And still the lesson goes on,  
For this is an old story that is never done  
And now the precept is of ribbon and shoe,  
What with linens and silks love finds to do  
And how man's heart is tangled in a string  
Or taken in gauze like a weak and helpless thing.  
Chloe falls asleep; and the long summer day  
Drifts slowly past the girls and the warm roses,

Giving in dreams its hours away.

Now Stella throws her head back and Phillis dis-  
poses

Her strong brown hands quietly in her lap  
And Rose's slender feet grow restless and tap  
The turf to an imaginary tune.

Now all this grace of youthful bodies and faces  
Is wrought to a glow by the golden weather of  
June;

Now, Love, completing grace of all the graces,  
Strong in these hearts thy pure streams rise,  
Transmuting what they learn by heavenly al-  
chemistries.

Swift from the listeners the spell vanishes,  
And through the tinkling, empty words,  
True thoughts of true love press,  
Flying and wheeling nearer,  
As through a sunny sky a flock of birds  
Against the throbbing blue grows clearer and  
clearer,  
So closer come these thoughts and dearer.

Helen rises with a laugh;  
Chloe wakes;  
All the enchantment scatters off like chaff,  
The cord is loosened and the spell breaks.  
Rosalind  
Resolves that to-night she will be kind to her lover,  
Unreflecting, warm and kind.  
Celia tells the lessons over,  
Counting on her fingers—one and two . . .  
Ribbon and shoe,  
Skirts, flowers, song, dancing, laughter, eyes . . .



Through the whole catalogue of formal gallantry  
 And studious coquetries,  
 Counting to herself maliciously.

But the old, the fading shepherdess, Aristonoë,  
 Rises stiffly and walks alone  
 Down the broad path where densely the laurels  
 grow,

And over a little lawn, not closely mown,  
 Where wave the flowering grass and the rich  
 meadow-sweet.

She seems to walk painfully now and slow  
 And drags a little on her high-heeled feet.

She stops at last below  
 An old and twisted plum-tree, whose last petal is  
 gone,

Leans on the comfortable, rugged bole  
 And stares through the green leaves at the droop-  
 ing sun.

The tree and the warm light comfort her ageing soul.

On the other lawn behind her, out of sight,

The girls at play

Drive out melancholy with lively delight

And the wind carries their songs and laughter  
 away.

Some begin dancing and seriously tread

A modern measure up and down the grass,

Turn, slide with bending knees and pass

With dipping hand and poising head,

Float through the sun in pairs, like newly shed

And golden leaves astray

Upon the warm wind of an autumn day,

When the Indian summer rules the air.

Others, having found,  
Lying idly on the sun-hot ground,  
Shuttlecocks and battledores,  
Play with the buoyant feathers and stare  
Dazzled at the plaything as it soars,  
Vague against the shining sky,  
Where light yet throbs and confuses the eye,  
Then see it again, white and clear,  
As slowly, poisedly it falls by  
The dark green foliage and floats near.  
But Celia, apart, is pensive and must sigh  
And Anais but faintly pursues the game.  
An encroaching, inner flame  
Burns in their hearts with the acrid smoke of  
unrest;  
But gaiety runs like quicksilver in Rose's breast  
And Phillis, rising,  
Walks by herself with high and springy tread,  
All her young blood racing from heels to head,  
Breeding new desires and a new surprising  
Strength and determination,  
Whereof are bred  
Confidence and joy and exultation.

The long day closes;  
Rosalind's hour draws near, and Chloe's and  
Rose's,  
The hour that Celia has prayed,  
The hour for which Anais and Stella have stayed,  
When Helen shall forget her wit  
And Phillida by a sure arrow at length be hit,  
And Phillis, the fleet runner, be at length over-  
taken,

When this bough of young blossoms  
 By the rough, eager gatherers shall be shaken.  
 Their eyes grow dim,  
 Their hearts flutter like taken birds in their bosoms,  
 As the light dies out of heaven,  
 And a faint, delicious tremor runs through every  
     limb  
 And faster the volatile blood through their veins is  
     driven.

The long day closes;  
 The last light fades in the amber sky;  
 Warm through the warm dusk glow the roses  
 And a heavier shade drops slowly from the trees,  
 While through the garden as all colours die  
 The scents come livelier on the quickening breeze.  
 The world grows larger, vaguer, dimmer,  
 Over the dark laurels, a few faint stars glimmer;  
 The moon, that was a pallid ghost,  
 Hung low on the horizon, faint and lost,  
 Comes up, a full and splendid golden round  
 By black and sharp-cut foliage overcrossed.  
 The girls laugh and whisper now with hardly a  
     sound  
 Till all sound vanishes, dispersed in the night,  
 Like a wisp of cloud that fades in the moon's  
     light  
 And the garden grows silent and the shadows grow  
 Deeper and blacker below  
 The mysteriously moving and murmuring trees,  
 That stand out darkly against the luminous sky;  
 Huge stand the trees,  
 Shadowy, whispering immensities,

That rain down quietude and darkness on heart  
and eye.

None move, none speak, none sigh,  
But from the laurels comes a leaping voice  
Crying in tones that seem not man's or boy's  
But only joy's,  
And hard behind a loud tumultuous crying,  
A tangled skein of noise,  
And the girls see their lovers come, each vying  
Against the next in glad and confident poise  
Or softly moving  
To the side of the chosen with gentle words and  
loving  
Gifts for her pleasure of sweetmeats and jewelled  
toys.

Dear Love, whose strength no pedantry can stir,  
Whether in thine iron enemies  
Or in thine own strayed follower,  
Bemused with subtleties and sophistries,  
Now dost thou rule the garden, now  
The gatherer's hands have grasped the scented  
bough.

Slow the sweet hours resolve and one by one are  
sped.

The garden lieth empty. Overhead  
A nightjar rustles by, wing touching wing,  
And passes, uttering  
His hoarse and whirring note.  
The daylight birds long since are fled,  
Nor has the moon yet touched the brown bird's  
throat.

All's quiet, all is silent, all around  
The day's heat rises gently from the ground  
And still the broad moon travels up the sky,  
Now glancing through the trees and now so high  
That all the garden through her rays are shed,  
And from the laurels one can just descry  
Where in the distance looms enormously  
The old house, with all its windows black and  
dead.

1918-1921

1918-1921

## THE ONLY BEGETTER

THESE are not fair, except you walk with me,  
These heathery paths upon the wind-blown  
steep;  
There could no magic in the wild-flowers be,  
Save from your heart they drew it, wild and  
deep.

Round the vast world I turn and turn amazed  
Mine eyes grow keener for having looked on  
you  
And what in the world has pleased me and I have  
praised  
Gives you through me again the praises due.

And have I other loves, what love have they  
Of mine, except what in your love I learnt,  
In whose eyes first I saw immortal day,  
In whose arms first my sorrow to joy was burnt?

Save as you taught, I could not see nor sing  
And all I sing is only in your praise,  
And you the ultimate spirit of everything  
That moves in my heart and colours my fleeting  
days.



## THE RIDDLE

I DREAM the marriage of the visible  
With the unseen, the solving of all skeins;  
I dream that in my verse I read the spell,  
The last answer to the world's delights and pains,  
The gleaming leaves of beeches, the shade thrown  
By wavering ripples on the stream-worn stone,  
The glowing green of the young wheat, the cries  
Of birds, the lapsing sighs  
Of spring's warm airs in lucent hedge and tree,  
All these and with these too the discontent  
Of life's frustration and the vanity  
Of happiness too casually spent—  
All these I contemplate  
And would the seeming with the real fuse,  
The lordly vesture with the spirit mate,  
And publish in great verse the immortal news.  
Still the dream fades; and closer home doth dwell,  
Living with me, whether I sleep or wake,  
What neither here nor there my hand can take;  
Hidden in love lies the unriddled spell,  
Nearest the heart and there least scrutable.

## A NIGHT PIECE

*To Arthur Geddes*

COME out and walk. The last few drops of light  
Drain silently out of the cloudy blue;  
The trees are full of the dark-stooping night,  
The fields are wet with dew.

All's quiet in the wood but, far away—  
Look down the hillside and across the plain—  
Moves, with long trail of white that marks its way,  
The softly panting train.

Come through the clearing. Hardly now we see  
The flowers, save dark or light against the grass,  
Or glimmering silver on a scented tree  
That trembles as we pass.

Hark now! So far, so far . . . that distant song . . .  
Move not the rustling grasses with your feet.  
The dusk is full of sounds, that all along  
The muttering boughs repeat.

So far, so faint, we lift our heads in doubt.  
Wind, or the blood that beats within our ears,  
Has feigned a dubious and delusive note,  
Such as a dreamer hears.

Again . . . again! The faint sounds rise and fail.  
So far the enchanted tree, the song so low . . .  
A drowsy thrush, a waking nightingale?  
Silence. We do not know.

## THE CATACLYSM

WHEN a great wave disturbs the ocean cold  
And throws the bottom waters to the sky,  
Strange apparitions on the surface lie,  
Great battered vessels, stripped of gloss and gold,  
And, writhing in their pain, sea-monsters old,  
Who stain the waters with a bloody dye,  
With unaccustomed mouths bellow and cry  
And vex the waves with struggling fin and fold.

And with these too come little trivial things,  
Tossed from the deeps by the same casual hand;  
A faint sea-flower, dragged from the lowest sand,  
That will not undulate its luminous wings  
In the slow tides again, lies dead and swings  
Along the muddy ripples to the land.

## IN ABSENCE

My lovely one, be near to me to-night,  
For now I need you most, since I have gone  
Through the sparse woodland in the fading light,  
Where in time past we two have walked alone.  
I heard the nightjar spin his pleasant note  
And saw the wild rose folded up for sleep  
And whispered, though the soft word choked my  
throat,  
Your dear name out across the valley deep.  
Be near to me, for now I need you most.  
To-night I saw an unsubstantial flame  
Flickering along those shadowy paths, a ghost  
That turned to me and answered to your name,  
Mocking me with a wraith of far delight.  
. . . My lovely one, be near to me to-night.

## THE GLOW-WORM

*To Sylvia and Robert Lynd*

THE pale road winds faintly upward into the dark  
    skies  
And beside it on the rough grass that the wind  
    invisibly stirs,  
Sheltered by sharp-speared gorse and the berried  
    junipers,  
Shining steadily with a green light, the glow-worm  
    lies.

We regard it; and this hill and all the other hills  
That fall in folds to the river, very smooth and  
    steep,  
And the hangers and brakes that the darkness  
    thickly fills  
Fade like phantoms round the light, and night is  
    deep, so deep,

That all the world is emptiness about the still flame  
And we are small shadows standing lost in the  
    huge night.  
We gather up the glow-worm, stooping with  
    dazzled sight,  
And carry it to the little enclosed garden whence  
    we came,

And place it on the short grass. Then the shadowy  
flowers fade,

The walls waver and melt and the houses disappear  
And the solid town trembles into unsubstantial  
shade

Round the light of the burning glow-worm, steady  
and clear.

## THE SKY AT CAMPDEN

*To Eleanor and Alec Miller*

FOLD after fold, the smoky clouds come over  
The western edge,  
Sag, lift and sink and at last discover  
A long thin strip of delicate blue sky.  
Sharp drawn against it, the thin hedge  
Upon the hill-top and the high  
Unstirring groves of trees  
First catch the sun as the clouds go over,  
Sailing eastward to uncover  
The airy width of blue.  
And all the fields above and here all these  
Shine green and golden, slowly fade  
And in the shadow lose their burning hue,  
Where grass and leaf and corn one hue are made,  
And faintly, gradually glow again  
As the sun takes them,  
Or shudder, veiled in the darkly gleaming rain,  
Or ripple over as the wind shakes them,  
Turning a new face to the skeltering air,  
Lovely in light or rain or shade,  
In any weather inalterably fair.

Here the sky hangs so closely overhead,  
From Dover's Hill to Blockley, a canopy spread



Roofing the valley with a changing light,  
Where, underneath, long roads, winding and white,  
Toil up the hill-sides to approach the sky,  
Where the small town and all its villages lie,  
Ruled and completed by the blue above.  
And here the clouds that elsewhere distantly move,  
Aloof, remote from human care or love,  
Share in our daily life, no further away  
Than the old elms or the warm ricks of hay,  
And the sky is scarce stranger than the grass we  
tread,

And the rain falls softer, kinder here  
Than in other places out of the austere  
Hard heavens, wherefrom the traveller bends his  
head.

Other skies are strange. We have been where  
Earth's friendliness grew thin in the cold air  
And the small houses clung to the hill-side  
And the restless wind in gaunt trees muttered and  
cried

As it fled on. Not so this charmed air  
That softly steals by thicket and grove  
With the low voice and the tender hands of love,  
Or races singing across the fields and throws  
Straws and soft grass and flowers lightly down  
Where, like the bared heart of a dying rose,  
In all its golden beauty glows the town.

And sometimes in the evening all's dove-pale,  
When the day-weary breezes fail  
And halt to make the valley a fold  
For their far-driven flocks of cloud. We see  
The cloudy edges of the lifted wold

Melt in the gray and fade in mystery.  
Once rising early we beheld  
Against dawn's pure and quiet western sky,  
Poised in the airless branches of the tree,  
A glowing apple night's thick dews had swelled  
To sudden ripeness, the first, no neighbour by.  
And once a burning haystack in the dusk  
Lit up the valley, and all the people came  
From the deeper night around, from the sombre  
    husk

That burst to show this crimson fruit of flame;  
And the tall fire rose into the sky and cast  
Reflections and pale twilights far away,  
And on the passing clouds a mimic day  
That faded as they passed.

Draw back the curtain, throw the window wide!  
Midnight. Round love's own dwelling, where we  
    dwell,  
Silently, softly, those great presences glide,  
Nothing their track to tell,  
Save where the staring pin-point stars go out;  
Still overhead they slide  
In slow benignant folding us about.  
Love, draw the curtain again and we will sleep:  
Let the friendly sky and the clouds our vigil keep.

## CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY

How wonderful the world, how wonderful the  
    race  
    That binds with rails her savage earth, that rides  
        her skies,  
That in the sun's inflamed or the moon's tranquil  
    face  
    Wets her wild soil with tears and lives and loves  
        and dies!

Men have not ceased from toil since first they went  
    upright,  
    Their ships traverse the seas, their bridges span  
        the streams,  
They harness fire and water and create power and  
    light,  
    They have overcome the earth in the intervals  
        of dreams.

Long has their struggle been, diverse the deeds  
    they do,  
    Harsh is their enemy, bitter the wounds they  
        bear;  
How many of their sons the merciless water  
    slew,  
    How many died by fire or tumbled from the  
        air?

CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY 251

Still inch by painful inch the reluctant world is  
won,

The mountains' entrails pierced, the highest  
summit trod,

And against deadly rain and the uncertain sun  
Each year the crops are wrenched from the un-  
willing sod,

And houses piled on high that from earth's flesh  
are made,

Beasts bound and tamed and taught to be the  
slaves of man;

And men arise and burn with lofty hope and fade,  
Leaving their sons advanced towards heaven a  
little span.

Yea, were not this enough, to have struggled with  
the earth,

To have seen their fellows die by famine, fire,  
and plague,

To have seen their women anguish in the pangs  
of birth,

To have known all these brave souls lost in the  
lightless vague?

But man aspires past death, hungers beyond the  
flesh,

Dreams of he knows not what, a vast and  
shadowy thing,

Forgets his fight with earth and strives to break  
the mesh

Even of his own desires, and spread a huger  
wing,

## CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY

How wonderful the world, how wonderful the  
    race  
    That binds with rails her savage earth, that rides  
        her skies,  
That in the sun's inflamed or the moon's tranquil  
    face  
    Wets her wild soil with tears and lives and loves  
        and dies!

Men have not ceased from toil since first they went  
    upright,  
    Their ships traverse the seas, their bridges span  
        the streams,  
They harness fire and water and create power and  
    light,  
    They have overcome the earth in the intervals  
        of dreams.

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wing,

252 CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY

Forgets his fight with earth, turns from the sullen  
foe,  
Leaves the far seas uncrossed, the forest still  
unpathed,  
Lays by his spade and gazes where the high clouds  
go  
Or idly broods above the sea by moonlight  
bathed.

And strange new longings rise and vaguer mightier  
dreams  
Well in his boundless heart as now through  
timeless hours  
He hears the murmur of the bridged or unbridged  
streams  
And sees the fields alight with a million burning  
flowers.

Yea, were not this enough? O banded heavens, say,  
To have added pain to pain, to have added  
dreams to toil,  
To have slaved in dreams by night as with his  
hands by day,  
To have wakened in his breast the soul's dark  
serpent-coil?

But dream breeds dream apace and covers all the  
world  
With a fair image prophesying things to be,  
And while through heaving time his fragile life is  
hurled  
Audacious man hath paused and dreamt he may  
be free,

CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY 253

And pondering greatly thus, leapt on his fellow-  
man;

And wars have scored the earth and the sea  
drunk her fill,

And marching, ruining armies laid their dusty ban  
On harbour, field and barn, and lofty-palaced  
hill.

If earth had had a heart, surely that heart was glad  
To see her pygmy foes squander their blood in  
vain,

To see her hills again in her own loose weeds clad,  
To see the dams and dykes yield to her high-  
piled rain.

And still the contest grew, still the dream huger  
swelled

And with its wings obscured the opening vast  
abyss,

Till at the last mankind, in noblest fury held,  
Swayed like two wrestlers locked close to a  
precipice!

*October, 1918*



## MORNING ON THE HILL

SOFTLY, softly the long bare boughs are rubbed  
together,  
A dry leaf spindles down, like a bird's light feather.  
Still, oh still—  
Silence hath laid, in her woods and on her hill,  
The sighing wind asleep,  
And thin clouds smoke over, gently creep  
Across the bare furrows and rubbed grass and  
settle down,  
Coiling in faint wreaths among the golden stones  
of the town.

Still, oh still! There is harm in speaking,  
Speech is too hard, speech only means waking  
Into a world of words where lovely things are  
bound by names,  
Where we pursue colour and call her flowers or  
flames.

Yet speak if you will, or rather sing  
As softly, softly as the bare boughs rubbed to-  
gether,  
Make no more sound than touch of leaf or feather,  
A song as vague as the mist-wreaths that cling  
Round the woods and the fields and the bare sides  
of the down

MORNING ON THE HILL 255

And the tall ghostly gleaming houses of the town,  
A song that shall mix with silence, a faint escaping  
thing . . .

Then, then we may find in the magic of this hour  
Where it is thought is still, where the brain has no  
power,

And words have no meaning except their sound.

## SONNET

THE dying man, whom all give up for dead,  
Sees how his world a little circle grows,  
The fire's warmth falling on the quiet bed,  
The sunlight on the wall—sees not, but knows  
How at his window the trees bud and leaf  
And clouds march in procession through the sky,  
Knows, but sees none of these, and his belief  
Fails, and he chides his brain for fantasy.  
But should he rise at length, should he awake  
From that dark sleep and visit once again,  
Feeble and slow as a new-sloughing snake,  
What were before but hill and sky and plain,  
He finds and hails, at each revealing turn,  
Gold plains and skies like gems and hills that burn.

## DOVER'S HILL

*To F. L. Griggs*

FROM this hill where the air's so clear  
We can see away and away,  
And the villages, far as near,  
Shine in the lucid day.  
On rough short grass we tread  
And thistles bend at our feet  
And a lark sings overhead  
And the clouds are white and fleet.  
The wind is strong in our faces,  
It drives us, we veer and yield,  
And a broken thistle-top races  
Over the tossing field;  
But below, as we look around,  
The deep long plains appear  
Like a lost country drowned  
In a tranquil flood of air,  
Whence now and again there rises  
To the listener on this shore  
The muffled sound of the voices  
Of bells that ring once more.

## THE NIGHTJARS

ALL day the cuckoo has sung his double cries,  
Far in the woods and hidden, or close but not  
seen:

Once he flew overhead and we heard the sound rise  
In the song's space and die in a thicket green.

All the day the blackbird has sung with the thrush  
And the nightingale, though we heard him not  
clear,

And others chirped and murmured from bush to  
bush,

Loud, soft, shrill, uncertain, far and near.

Now on the dark hill, after that tumult of song,  
Silence settles down, a step before night,  
While on the ground, and in the trees, and all  
along

The widespread horizon slowly dies the light,

Like a rainbowed fish held dying in the net,  
With last lovely flushes to the final gray;  
And over the black hill a soft wind blows yet,  
Carrying on wide wings the last light away.

How immense the silence! So a fountain falls,  
When the jet fails, with a last scattered spray,

And the wind goes on, as the settling thrush calls,  
Carrying on soft wings the last echoes away.

Step by step, slowly, we climb the silent hill,  
Speechless, almost frightened. As the path  
wheels round  
Into an open glade where the grass is hushed and  
still,  
Warmth rises sudden and startling from the  
ground.

The trees merge and melt in the fading gray sky,  
And now from tree or bush, we cannot tell  
where,

A thin sound arises, faintly, haltingly,  
Stops to take breath and then fills the quiet air

With a hoarse, sweet music. Thereon, all around,  
All the other nightjars join in the whirring song,  
And, as we pause to hear, the shadowy trees  
resound  
Till the whole vague hill-side is filled with the  
throng,

Singing louder and louder. But all at once  
The chorus gives way to the sweetest voice,  
A single and lonely singer, whose unchanging runs  
Charm our ears with magic, monotonous noise.

He pauses. We seek him; but the song once gone,  
There is nothing to show him. We clap hands in  
vain.

Now over the crest a new faint song is begun,  
That we can hardly hear. Is it he again?

And as we halt, doubtful, in the darkness growing  
Thicker and stranger round us, full of mysteries,  
With the first night airs upon our faces blowing,  
A dark shape flaps out from the invisible trees,

And slides across our path, a moving clot of night,  
His wings knocking loudly as he flies along,  
Startling the stillness. And he fades out of our  
sight  
And in his shadowy thicket resumes the song.

## IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

WHEN the lamp's guardian flame was out he fell  
Through dark abysses full of hollow sound,  
Through caves of sleep that murmured like a shell,  
Till in night's furthest corridors he found,  
Past any thought or feeling, his escape,  
Where being loses shape,  
Where sorrow melts and merges in profound  
Blackness, that is not pricked by any light.  
There he found rest, how long he could not know,  
In the deep middle of unfriendly night,  
Safe in his stupor through the to and fro  
Of the slow hours which strike and will not spare.  
But sorrow's pack soon scented that dark lair,  
And as he slept he knew that gradually  
Light grew around him, lifting veil by veil  
The swathings of his hid security,  
Till darkness' self grew pale.

Whither he wandered in that middle land,  
Shining and silent, between sleep and waking,  
How should he tell? But yet he sees them stand,  
Those calm and carven poplars, rising, breaking  
Like frozen fountains the still, pearl-pure skies,  
Sees, but not hears, the soundless aspen shaking  
Over the long and lichened seat of stone  
Where he awoke. He lifted heedless eyes



Across the lawns and flower-beds overgrown  
Up to the house that crowned the terraces,  
And down again, and saw the staring pond,  
Lucent and smooth and ringed with irises,  
The tall yew-hedge, the orchard trees beyond. . . .  
All this, most strange, was strange beyond his care,  
For grief attended him,  
Moved like a wind soft fingers in his hair  
And with her touch his burning eyes made dim.  
And now his eyes dropped tears, and did not see  
The glowing house, poised on the soft low sky,  
The rich warm flowers that nodded silently  
Around him, or the birds in bush or tree  
That moved as noiseless as the clouds. But soon  
Across the hush of that too quiet noon  
Something unseen yet drew his misty gaze  
To look for what he guessed not. So there came  
Softly towards him through the garden ways  
A girl in white. Like an unreal flame  
A golden pattern played upon her dress,  
Which as he stared at her he knew to be  
Cast by the tears on his own eyelashes,  
Gathering softly and heavily.

Then as again his eyes were dimmed by tears  
And with the falling echo of old fears  
His heart was filled, he bowed his head and felt  
Her sudden soothing hand upon his hair;  
And moved by a strange reverence he knelt,  
Hiding his hot face in her hollow palms,  
And laid upon her lap his vague despair,  
Till as a mild wind risen at evening calms  
The last black vapours from a tumbled sky,

Her touch serenely rolled away his care  
And shed on him her own tranquillity.

A timeless moment thus he stayed and drew  
Peace from her hands and from her face unseen  
And in that posture greater quiet knew  
Than ever yet his heart had found between  
The grinding wheels of wakefulness and sleep,  
Which day or night are full of restless sound,  
Laments of giants bound  
Or lost birds crying on the lightless deep.  
A moment—then the darkness of her hand  
Grew thicker round his eyes and held no more  
The warm reflected sunshine of that land . . .  
Deeper and colder . . . and a shudder tore  
His waking body and a thin noise sighed  
Through a new darkness dense and terrible  
That blackened round him. "Stay, stay, stay!" he  
cried,

Like the harsh notes of a storm-shaken bell.  
But thicker all about the shadow fell,  
Till with a pang he opened heavy eyes  
On the beginning of a pale sunrise,  
That flickered chilly on the lamp and bed.  
Outside his window the sad aspen shook,  
Murmuring loudly, and its tapered head  
The poplar sighing bowed. An early rook  
In the stiff elm rehearsed the grating cry  
Which all the others answered back again.  
Burdened by life and by a memory,  
He rose to join the usual world of men.

## A HOLLOW ELM

*To Edward Marsh*

WHAT hast thou not withstood,  
    Tempest-despising tree,  
Whose bloat and riven wood  
    Gapes now so hollowly,  
What rains have beaten thee through many years,  
What snows from off thy boughs have dripped like  
tears?

Calmly thou standest now  
    Upon thy sunny mound;  
The first spring breezes flow  
    Past with sweet dizzy sound;  
Yet on thy pollard top the branches few  
Stand stiffly out, disdain to murmur too.

The children at thy foot  
    Open new-lighted eyes  
Where on gnarled bark and root  
    The soft warm sunshine lies—  
Dost thou upon thine ancient sides resent  
The touch of youth, quick and impermanent?

These at the beck of spring  
    Live in the moment still;

## A HOLLOW ELM

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Thy boughs unquivering,  
    Remembering winter's chill  
And many other winters past and gone,  
Are mocked, not cheated, by the transient sun.

Hast thou so much withstood,  
    Dumb and unmoving tree,  
That now thy hollow wood  
    Stiffens disdainfully  
Against the soft spring airs and soft spring rain,  
Knowing too well that winter comes again?

## THE GLADE

WE may raise our voices even in this still glade;  
Though the colours and shadows and sounds so  
fleeing seem,  
We shall not dispel them. They are not made  
Frailly by earth or hands, but immortal in our  
dream.

We may touch the faint violets with the hands of  
thought  
Or lay the pale core of the wild arum bare;  
And for ever in our minds the white wild cherry  
is caught,  
Cloudy against the sky and melting into air.

This which we have seen is eternally ours,  
No others shall tread in the glade which now  
we see;  
Their hands shall not touch the frail tranquil  
flowers,  
Nor their hearts faint in wonder at the wild  
white tree.

## STANZAS WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

How then, my dark and empty spirit,  
Wouldst thou employ these brooding days?  
The senses lose their trivial merit,  
The sky grows chill, the rose decays;  
We are not now what we have been,  
We see no more what we have seen.

Thus in the middle of her season  
Sometimes the flowering may doth fade.  
Who knoweth by what inner treason  
Her rich adornment is betrayed?  
Now as the blossom from the tree  
So falls my old content from me.

I cannot tell what saps me so  
And takes enjoyment from my mind:  
I only see the bright months grow  
Duller or my weak eyes more blind.  
This year hath ousted from my breast  
Joy for a dark and vague unrest.

I read in some forgotten story  
How in the mountains of the west  
Where the calm sea in sun-flecked glory  
Under the snow-peaks lies at rest,  
The dying eagle seeks a place  
Where a great wind drives up in space;

268 STANZAS WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

And there though from his failing wings  
 Motion has gone with joy and strength,  
 On the ascending stream he swings  
 Into the sky and sees at length  
 On the warm current soaring high  
 The ledge where first he learnt to fly,

The valleys where of old he preyed,  
 The eyries where he dwelt and loved,  
 The eyrie where his nest was made  
 Which long the tempest hath removed—  
 In his ascent he sees these things  
 And needs no motion of his wings.

And still up-borne he rises higher  
 And fades from his companions' sight,  
 Lost in the sun's descending fire,  
 Floating amid a sea of light—  
 Would that we too, when pleasures fail,  
 Could find at last that upward gale!

Would that we too, no effort making,  
 On such a current could aspire  
 Through the thick air and cloud-wreaths  
     breaking  
 Into the heights that we desire,  
 There in a lonely still delight  
 To float upon a sea of light!

## THE SWIMMERS

THE cove's a shining plate of blue and green  
With darker belts between  
The trough and crest of the lazily rising swell,  
And the great rocks throw purple shadows down  
Where transient sun-sparks wink and burst and  
drown,

And the distant glimmering floor of pebble and shell  
Is bright or hidden as the shadow wavers,  
And everywhere the restless sun-steeped air  
Trembles and quavers,

As though it were  
More saturate with light than it could bear.  
Now come the swimmers from slow-dripping caves,  
Where the shy fern creeps under the veined roof,  
And wading out meet with glad breast the waves.  
One holds aloof,

And climbs alone the reef with shrinking feet  
That scarce endure the jagged stone's dull heat,  
Till on the edge he poises  
And flies toward the water, vanishing  
In wreaths of white, with echoing liquid noises,  
And swims beneath, a vague, distorted thing.

Now all the other swimmers leave behind  
The crystal shallow and the foam-wet shore  
And sliding into deeper water find



A living coolness in the lifting flood:  
Then through their bodies leaps the sparkling  
    blood,  
So that they feel the faint earth's drought no more.  
There now they float, heads raised above the green,  
White bodies cloudily seen,  
Further and further from the brazen rock  
On which the hot air shakes, on which the tide  
Vainly throws with soundless shock  
The cool and lagging wave. Out, out they go,  
And now upon a mirrored cloud they ride  
Or turning over, with soft strokes and slow,  
Slide on like shadows in a tranquil sky.  
Behind them, on the tall parched cliff, the dry  
And dusty grasses grow  
In shallow ledges of the arid stone,  
Starving for coolness and the touch of rain.  
But, though to earth they must return again,  
Here come the soft sea airs to meet them, blown  
Over the surface of the outer deep,  
Scarce moving, staying, falling, straying, gone,  
Light and delightful as the touch of sleep. . . .

One wakes and splashes round,  
And magically all the others wake  
From their sea-dream, and now with rippling sound  
Their arms the silence break.  
And now again the crystal shallows take  
The dripping bodies whose cool hour is done:  
They pause upon the beach, they pause and sigh,  
Then vanish in the caverns one by one.

Soon the wet footmarks on the stones are dry:  
The cove sleeps on beneath the unwavering sun.

## THE ROCK POOL

*To Alice Warrender*

THIS is the sea. In these uneven walls  
A wave lies prisoned. Far and far away  
Outward to ocean, as the slow tide falls,  
Her sisters through the capes that hold the bay  
Dancing in lovely liberty recede.  
Yet lovely in captivity she lies,  
Filled with soft colours, where the waving weed  
Moves gently and discloses to our eyes  
Blurred shining veins of rock and lucent shells  
Under the light-shot water; and here repose  
Small quiet fish and dimly glowing bells  
Of sleeping sea-anemones that close  
Their tender fronds and will not now awake  
Till on these rocks the waves returning break.

## FÊTE GALANTE: THE DANCER

BETWEEN the hither and the further woods,  
On whose dark branches beats the sun in vain,  
Out in the midst where the intense light broods,  
There moves a livelier light, a living fire  
With speed that seems  
That still and sleeping radiance to disdain,  
And yet no more to tire  
Than the quick shapes that haunt our happy  
dreams.

Light-skirted, feather-footed, laughing, dancing,  
Borne on a breath of swift and buoyant air,  
Turning and sidling, retiring and advancing,  
She moves like thistledown, she floats away,  
Swings and returns, lifts eyes to take the stare  
Of the delighted watchers. Rise and sway  
Her skirts about her; and now she slowly  
moves,  
As though an unseen choir of singing Loves  
Hovered about her thrown-back head and cried  
Delicious praise down to her smiling pride.  
And every turn of her young body makes  
A silent changing music, fast or slow,  
Which as she pauses breaks  
And sinks upon itself in shining overthrow.

## FÊTE GALANTE: THE DANCER 273

Silence unbroken follows the silent measure,  
The enraptured group that watched her quietly  
breathes

In the arrested silence of that pause  
An air filled full with the sweet scent of pleasure.  
Then, as a swordsman slowly sheathes  
The blade wherewith he wove a net of light,  
So she in ordinary flesh withdraws  
The coloured image, volatile and bright,  
That danced before them and enchanted them.  
Her arms fall softly to her sides,  
Soft to the knee falls the skirt's airy hem,  
The taut knees bend, the waist relaxes, swift  
Down on the grass the unstrung body slides.  
She lies there huddled, hidden the flushed face,  
Her shoulders heaving up the filmy shift,  
One leg outstretched in spent, neglectful grace.

Low mutter they their praise that softly reaches  
The panting girl. She does not raise her head  
But at the music of their grateful speeches  
All her slack body comfortably glows  
And in ecstatic weariness she makes  
The sun-warmed turf a bed;  
Her limbs fall looser, the soft eyelids close,  
She sleeps. No voice her languid slumber breaks;  
But now the watchers, musing deep and far,  
Lift up their eyes  
Towards the vague, the sapphirine calm skies,  
While, like a visionary moving star,  
Still through their thoughts her dancing image  
flies.

## CONSTANTINOPLE

I suddenly realise that the ambition of my life has been—since I was two—to go on a military expedition against Constantinople. . . . This is nonsense.—*Letters of Rupert Brooke.*

It still waits redeeming.—JAMES ELROY FLECKER.

### FIRST VOICE

No more, they say, the Host is raised in that  
Cathedral which was mine.

### SECOND VOICE

Like you I too beneath that dome have eat the  
bread and drunk the wine  
That's banished thence, but not like yours my  
empire shook at last and fell  
And then I died upon the walls built by another  
Constantine.

### FIRST VOICE

All's changed, they say, all's changed within that  
lovely and most sacred shell,  
And where dark unbelievers pray no more the holy  
eikons shine.

### SECOND VOICE

I do not know. I do not know. When I went out to  
fight that day

My starving people filled the streets and cheered  
 me thinly on my way.  
 Behind me lay the Christian town, before me stood  
 the infidel;  
 And they were many, we were few—I know no  
 more but that I fell.  
 I could not see or hear or ask, my face being  
 masked with blood and clay.

FIRST VOICE

Byzantium was proud and strong. When war and  
 fire had struck and ceased,  
 To build her lovelier than before I took the trea-  
 sures of the east.  
 A thousand cunning artists worked on floor and  
 pillar, porch and dome,  
 In marble and in precious stones to make the Holy  
 Wisdom's home;  
 And there when all the toil was done I knelt and  
 prayed, I bowed my head,  
 Knowing that now Byzantium was royal as the  
 elder Rome.

SECOND VOICE

And is the Holy Wisdom fled since that fierce  
 creed rolled o'er my head?

FIRST VOICE

The heathen prays where once we prayed, now  
 that both you and I are dead.  
 Poor fallen king, nine hundred years from me to  
 you the city stood

And seven centuries her walls were washed in vain  
with Moslem blood,  
An angry tide that rose to flood and boiled and  
stormed and ebbd again,  
Where like a torrent in the sea the blood of our  
own Greeks was shed.

## SECOND VOICE

So deep I fell in my defeat, the centuries that wax  
and wane  
Have passed like shadows on the grave wherein I  
lie and do not know  
How many years are gone since then, how fares it  
with your sacred fane.

## FIRST VOICE

I am a shade no less than you—thin rumours reach  
us here below.  
How should I tell what falls on earth and how the  
tides of battle flow?  
Yet it is said the Christians go against the heathen  
in our seat  
Though four long sullen centuries have left un-  
answered your defeat.

## SECOND VOICE

There were young men who fought with me, who  
stood with me upon the walls.  
Would in this waste of empty time that somewhere  
they and I could meet!  
They were my brothers and my friends who fought  
to keep the city free,

And I would take their hands again . . . something  
 within me stirs and calls . . .  
 O God, Whose house I fought to save, send back  
 my ancient friends to me,  
 They who were bound by the same bond and died  
 in armour as I died!

FIRST VOICE

Who is it comes?

SECOND VOICE

In this lone place, what younger  
 shadow wavers near?  
 None of my friends could find me here, the wastes  
 of hell are dark and wide,  
 And yet . . . and yet . . .

FIRST VOICE

Who are you? Speak! We  
 are two shades and nought to fear.

THIRD VOICE

I died a soldier.

SECOND VOICE

I as well. Come, brother, closer to  
 my side.  
 How come you, from what battlefield, what  
 banners had your enemy?

THIRD VOICE

I was a poet, I was young, a northern island gave  
 me birth,



I knew and loved my fellow-men, I knew and  
loved the lovely earth,  
Yet in my youth I married death and gave my life  
without a sigh,  
Gave all the love I bore and had, came to the eastern  
sea to die.  
My foes were yours.

## SECOND VOICE

The tale is true! Still they  
oppose the infidel!

## FIRST VOICE

God's mercy hath designed an end—speak on,  
young soldier, you speak well.  
Tell us how Christian arms again were carried up  
the Golden Horn  
And how again the Christian cross was planted on  
our citadel.

## THIRD VOICE

I died before, I lay alone, my comrades stormed  
the beach and hill,  
But where the earth was red and torn, my wistful  
spirit followed still.

## FIRST VOICE

I heard the thunder of that war, an unknown  
thunder strange to hear,  
Beat like a wave on Islam's shore, like doom within  
the Sultan's ear.

SECOND VOICE

O brother, speak! You died before, but still you  
 saw the army go  
 Between the city's holy walls and drive the heathen  
 from our throne.  
 Brother, upon those walls I fell, I fell four hundred  
 years ago,  
 Tell me——

THIRD VOICE

Within my valley-grave I felt a peace  
 till then unknown,  
 Happy I had not died in vain nor those who died  
 away from me . . .

FIRST VOICE

He pauses and his voice is lost, the fire of speech is  
 drowned with tears.

SECOND VOICE

O new companion, speak again, we have waited  
 here so many years!

THIRD VOICE

In life I had loved earth so well, the ties of earth  
 and flesh were strong,  
 And after I was laid in earth Scyros the island held  
 me long,  
 Till on a day the rumour came that sent me here  
 below to you,  
 Sickened of earth by grief and shame to know my  
 childish dream untrue.

## FIRST VOICE

What is the news you strive to tell? Has the first  
Mass not yet been said  
Beneath the dome where once I knelt and bowed a  
proud imperial head?

## THIRD VOICE

No Christian stands beneath that dome to eat the  
bread or drink the wine,  
No Mass has there been said or sung, but praises  
in a heathen tongue  
To those who gave the Turk again the sacred walls  
of Constantine.

## SECOND VOICE

We died in vain, my friends and I.

## THIRD VOICE

My friends and  
I have died in vain.

## FIRST VOICE

Nought given in the city's cause is wholly lost. The  
walls remain.  
O, raise your heads, my friends, and know that  
while the soaring dome shall stand,  
Though heathens hold it for a space the city still is  
Christian land,  
And though the years we wait be long, and black  
the deed and deep the shame,  
Yet still shall hope burn like a flame while Christian  
hearts and swords are strong.

O youngest friend, have peace awhile: though you  
    should wait as long as we,  
The life you gave was not in vain and you shall see  
    the city free.

*Note.*—This poem was written in February, 1920, on reading the announcement that Constantinople was to be handed back to the Turk. The three speakers are Justinian, Constantine Palæologus and Rupert Brooke. The verbal reminiscences of Flecker are, of course, deliberate.

## THE SHADOW

DEATH, would I feared not thee,  
But ever can I see  
Thy mutable shadow thrown  
Upon the walls of Life's warm, cheerful room.  
Companioned or alone,  
I feel the presence of that following gloom,  
Like one who vaguely knows  
Behind his back the shade his body throws—  
'Tis not thy shadow only, 'tis my own!

I face towards the light  
That rises fair and bright  
Over wide fields asleep,  
But still I know that stealthy darkness there  
Close at my heels doth creep,  
My ghostly company, my haunting care;  
And if the light be strong  
Before my eyes, through pleasant hours and long,  
Then, then, the shadow is most black and deep.

## BOATS AT NIGHT

How lovely is the sound of oars at night  
And unknown voices, borne through windless air,  
From shadowy vessels floating out of sight  
Beyond the harbour lantern's broken glare  
To those piled rocks that make on the dark wave  
Only a darker stain. The splashing oars  
Slide softly on as in an echoing cave  
And with the whisper of the unseen shores  
Mingle their music, till the bell of night  
Murmurs reverberations low and deep  
That droop towards the land in swooning flight  
Like whispers from the lazy lips of sleep.  
The oars grow faint. Below the cloud-dim hill  
The shadows fade and now the bay is still.

## PUPPET SONG

(From *Fête Galante*, an opera libretto written for Dame Ethel Smyth and produced at Covent Garden on June 11, 1923. The song explains action carried on in dumb show.)

SINCE in deceit there is much pleasure  
And since the world is all a cheat,  
Spare, O dancers, a moment's leisure  
To watch our pointed brief deceit.  
Stay, stay, stay!  
These are but dolls, as you are, in the play.

The world turns at its usual pace  
While Harlequin to Columbine  
Laments her forfeit, smiling face  
And in his sorrow seems divine,  
While with a nod  
Old Pantaloon leads in the embroiling god.

Who were despoiled, if Pierrot then  
Still in his garden lounged and dreamed  
Himself the happiest of men  
And all the future what it seemed?  
Ah, woe betide  
The world, if every bridegroom knew his bride!

But Pierrot, seeing, draws a knife  
And leaps on unarmed Harlequin

To let the sawdust of his life  
In vengeance of the mimic sin,  
And Columbine  
Sinks down half-swooning at the fell design.

O, what a doll can suffer! See,  
What bravery in a puppet's part!  
Now Pierrot, of his charity,  
The knife hath stuck in his own heart.  
For love he dies  
And only half in pain his mistress cries.

Now Harlequin has got his bride,  
And Pantaloon has had his fun,  
And love will never be denied,  
And, gracious folk, the show is done!  
No longer stay!  
These were, like you, but puppets in a play.



288    TO THE UNKNOWN VOICE

Forgotten voice, speak, speak again,  
Clearer than winds or waves or men.  
Like a lost friend in countries far away,  
Thou hast been for so long a day:  
Yet rise again, yet speak again to me;  
I dwindle, wanting thee!

## TO THE UNKNOWN LIGHT

In the sad spirit  
Where all is dark  
And fault and merit  
Are gray shapes stark,  
Each like his neighbour  
And each dim,  
And pleasure and labour  
Alike are grim,  
Shine down, O Light,  
Illumine this night.

Here in the gray  
Nor motion nor breath  
Nor joy of day  
Nor sharpness of death  
Relieves the endless  
Pitiless gloom  
Where goeth friendless  
Desire to her doom:  
Shine down, O Light,  
Illumine this night.

I know thou livest,  
Then shine, then shine,  
Thou that givest  
Help divine,

290 TO THE UNKNOWN LIGHT

Turn on this cold  
Thy burning eyes  
Ere starved and old  
The dark heart dies:  
Shine down, O Light,  
Illumine this night.

## THE EMIGRATION

BEFORE dawn, under the windless mountains, the  
people  
Came from their villages, assembling clan by clan,  
Through the last hours of night over black dusty  
roads

Trailing reluctant feet, driving the slow waggons,  
Men, women and children in the cold dusk con-  
founded.

Hardly a ray of light from the muffled sky,  
Hardly in that still dawn a sound from quiet air,  
Only the endless murmur of feet shuffling on,  
The sobbing of tired children, and a woman's  
tears

Held in her bosom like a stream running in dark-  
ness,

And a young man's quickened breath that made no  
more

Than a puff of white on the chill air. Night was  
long,

That night in the valley, and all the winds were  
still.

Slow and unseen came the first ascent of the road  
That led to the hidden path and another world.  
Here first the way grew stony, here first the feet  
Of the weaker stumbled and were bruised, the  
pebbles

Slipped under aching soles wrenching the careless  
ankle;

And now from summits yet in darkness unknown,  
From snowy slopes and dizzy, ice-belted peaks,  
Stole, with the louder sounding of the water-fall,  
A still wind hardly moving whose gentle breath  
Crept through woollen cloaks like the trickling of  
water.

The king, their leader, daunted his stout stallion  
And drew into a rocky cleft whence he watched  
The sad procession winding upwards in silence,  
Marked every drooping shoulder that bore a spear  
And every woman that held in cramped arms  
A child to her breast and every walking child  
That whimpered and stumbled. He saw them all,  
Though gray through the gray night they drooped  
and stumbled.

When the last had gone he turned and rode down-  
wards,  
Carefully, leaning back on his horse's haunches,  
And before him unseen, like messengers in haste,  
Plunged the rattling stones dislodged by the hooves.

On the flat land he first saw the growing light  
That hovered on the swift stream rustling beside  
him,  
Ice-cold, ice-gray, endlessly tossed and heaved  
In small blunt waves, as down from the glacier,  
Hung aloft still in night, it fled to the valley,  
There to grow calm, to grow smooth and peaceable,  
Spreading in reedy brooks through the water-  
meadows

Where the tadpoles thicken the stream and dragon-  
flies

Mate in late spring on their dizzy flights.  
Here the king paused as the twilight brightened.  
Light swelled as into an aching head comes sleep,  
Thus unknown, unperceived, but steadily growing,  
Till the near fields were distinct and the nearest  
farm

Plainly to be seen, with byre, barn and sheds,  
And there on the dung-heap a lazy cock  
Moving sluggish wings and lifting his head.  
And the light grew. And, beyond, the land was  
revealed,

Pastures and grain and the scattered houses  
Over which the elms spread out their broad  
branches;

And further beyond rose the desolate hills  
Covered with stubborn bushes, bracken and wiry  
grass,  
And the poisonous green marshes that lay in their  
hollows,

Bounding the narrow valley with an iron wall.

So, since the valley was narrow and close-bounded,  
A circle of fruitfulness hemmed in by the unfruitful,  
Since the quiet race brought forth ever more chil-  
dren,

Sons must leave their fathers, daughters their  
mothers,

The quiet be the unquiet and stay-at-homes be  
wanderers.

No words came to the king's lips. He gazed around  
him,

Slipped under aching soles wrenching the careless  
ankle;

And now from summits yet in darkness unknown,  
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Since the quiet race brought forth ever more chil-  
dren,

Sons must leave their fathers, daughters their  
mothers,  
The quiet be the unquiet and stay-at-homes be  
wanderers.

No words came to the king's lips. He gazed around  
him,



Dumbly regarding the land where to-day his  
brother

Ruled in his place. Far away his eyes travelled,  
Seeing the first smoke rising from a farmhouse,  
Twenty feet untroubled in the motionless air.  
They are rising, he whispered, the wife has lighted  
Their fire and the husband pauses in the door  
To look at his cattle grazing in the meadows.  
So have we all; and when we are gone  
Still every morning the fires will be lighted,  
Men will go to the fields and bring in the crops.  
In the cool dark barn where my oats were gathered,  
Where I rested on the heap and took soft handfuls  
Of the smooth hard grain that ran through my  
fingers,

This year my brother will gather his oats  
And coming in tired from walking his fields,  
Dazed with summer's glare, will throw himself  
down

On the yielding heap and hear the whispering  
Of the flowing grain that trickles round his body  
—Next year as well, and many, many years.

The light grew strong: it was now full morning.  
He turned his horse and rode like a storm  
After the marching people. Up the steep track  
The horse's strong shoulders forced the ground  
behind him,  
Plunging and pulling. The blue sky above  
Grew brighter and colder: with a rush of cold  
waters

The torrent hurled downwards in its narrow channel.  
On the high shoulder of the wind-swept mountain

The track turned round and beyond the corner  
The king in his haste found the people halted,  
Below them the abyss—and the shelving path  
Stretched narrow and treacherous into the distance.  
Strung out along it, huddled and comfortless,  
They made their poor breakfast. Their sullen eyes  
Looked only at the hard stone beneath their feet,  
Not backwards or forwards. But a group of women  
Clustered at the edge with gestures and sad cries,  
And in the midst of them a silent woman  
Stared into the gulf. For she was the mother  
Of the first that died, of the child whose foot  
Had turned on a pebble, throwing him over,  
Down, down, down, bouncing from ledge to ledge.  
There now his body, spread-eagled on the rubble,  
Alone, abandoned, waited vultures and wolves.  
The king rode past, saying nothing. His grim lips  
Were frozen hard by pain and love of his people.  
His hard bleak eyes stared onward where the  
    ribbon-path  
Vanished in the waste of the tumbled snowy moun-  
    tains,  
Peak after peak and chasm after chasm,  
Mercilessly lighted by the cold lucid sun.

•

## THE END

I DREAMT that I was standing in a wood  
Where the trees parted and a ride came through,  
Not used by many, for the undergrowth,  
Saplings five inches high and nettles, spread  
Across the ruts even to the middle. And  
On either side the tall trees rose and brambles  
Looped round the heavy boles their thorny ropes.  
Down the long track came slowly a weary rider.  
His horse's hooves made no sound in the wood,  
They moved so slowly. The horse was bony and  
old,

With ragged mane and tail and gnarled thin legs  
And head that drooped from the loose-hanging  
reins.

The rider was old and thin, his clothes were shabby,  
His saddle scratched and worn, his stirrups dull,  
Pitted with rust. He held between his hands  
Upon the saddle-bow a cup wrapped loosely  
In old discoloured rags. I could not see  
What shape it was, or whether of metal or glass,  
But as I looked I saw the rider's eyes  
Bent burning on it. Never on the road  
He turned his gaze but still upon the cup  
He stared and still the horse walked slowly on,  
Reins hanging on its scraggy neck. I saw  
Those eyes, so fiercely still, burn on the cup

And round them all the lines of the thin face  
Grooved by despair and shame that made a victory  
Seem like defeat—as joyless. Then behind  
The rider came a crowd of men and women  
Who walked the track as soundlessly as he.  
Behind the brambles dizzily I stared  
And half saw some and others not at all,  
But all I saw were such as every day  
Walk about city streets. There were rich men  
Glossily dressed, and women in stale rags,  
Children with smeary faces, dowdy women,  
Fussily proper, clerks, workmen, and tramps,  
And young girls proud still of their pretty bodies,  
And young men thinking of their games, and  
    schoolboys  
Carrying books. Thus through the wood they went,  
Following the rider, and their trampling boots  
Fell soundless on the thick-grown track, their  
    breathing  
Never disturbed the dust that in the air  
Rose from the full-blown meadow sweet.  
    They marched  
On and on unending, rank after rank,  
And still the long grass waved about their feet  
Unbroken. In their various faces I  
Could read nothing. Willing, uneager eyes  
Followed the rider, fading now from sight.  
After them in like procession came  
A cavalcade of beasts, the homely animals  
That live about our houses, dogs and cats  
And horses, and the small beasts of the fields,  
And mixed with them strange unknown tropical  
    things,

Flaming tigers and quaint-shaped burrowing  
brutes,

Hopping, leaping and crawling, and snakes and  
birds

That hovered in flocks above the track and alighted  
And flew again, cuckoo and eagle and dove

Mixing together. I gazed between the leaves

And still a mist hung heavy on my eyes

Blurring these shapes. And when they all were  
gone

Time paused an instant. Then the trees seemed  
To drag their long roots slowly from the ground  
And follow after, and the bushes too,

And like a swarm of bees the smaller plants,

Slender-stalked and starry-leafed, arose

And from my face the screen of bramble boughs

Suddenly fell; and all in that strange train

Swept onward and the earth was black and bare

And I was left alone, unsheltered, unshaded.

I looked around and there was nothing left,

No living thing, man, animal or plant

But bleak dead earth where no wind moved, rain  
fell,

Fire burnt. And still I stood. Then there came  
slowly

On the same way a figure mountain-high

Whose bright horns in the clouds, had there been  
clouds,

Would have projected. In his hands before him

He held a book, open, which he studied closely,

Walking on soundless feet, with downcast eyes.

And as he reached the spot where not my body

But now my fleshless spirit stood in terror

He paused and raised his head. The thundercloud  
eyes  
Stared up into the blank and colourless heaven,  
Then down again upon the fatal page.  
He closed the volume up. Then there was nothing.

## MEMORY

IN silence and in darkness memory wakes  
Her million sheathèd buds and breaks  
Her day-long winter when the light and noise  
And hard bleak breath of the outward-looking will  
Made barren her tender soil, when every voice  
Of her million airy birds was muffled or still.

One bud-sheath breaks:  
One sudden voice awakes.

What change grew in our hearts seeing one night  
That moth-winged ship drifting across the bay,

Her broad sail dimly white  
On cloudy waters and hills as vague as they?  
Some new thing touched our spirits with distant  
delight,

Half seen, half noticed, as we loitered down,  
Talking in whispers, to the little town,

Down from the narrow hill  
—Talking in whispers, for the air so still  
Imposed its silence on our lips and made  
A quiet equal with the equal shade  
That filled the slanting walk. That phantom now  
Slides with slack canvas and unwhispering prow  
Through the dark sea that this dark room has  
made.

Or the night of the closed eyes will turn to day  
And all day's colours start out of the gray.  
The sun burns on the water. The tall hills  
Push up their shady groves into the sky  
And fail and cease where the intense light spills  
Its parching torrent on the gaunt and dry  
Rock of the further mountains, whence the  
snow

That softened their harsh edges long is gone  
And nothing tempers now  
The hot flood falling on the barren stone.

O memory, take and keep  
All that my eyes, your servants, bring you home—  
Those other days beneath the low white dome  
Of smooth-spread clouds that creep  
As slow and soft as sleep,  
When shade grows pale and the cypress stands  
upright,  
Distinct in the cool light,  
Rigid and solid as a dark, hewn stone;  
And many another night  
That melts in darkness on the narrow quays  
And changes every colour and every tone  
And soothes the waters to a softer ease,  
When under constellations coldly bright  
The homeward sailors sing their way to bed  
On ships that motionless in harbour float.  
The circling harbour-lights flash green and red.  
And, out beyond, a steady travelling boat  
Breaking the swell with slow industrious oars  
At each stroke pours  
Pale lighted water from the lifted blade.



Now in the painted houses all around  
    Slow darkening windows call  
The empty unwatched middle of the night.  
The tide's few inches rise without a sound.  
On the black promontory's windless head,  
The last awake, the fireflies rise and fall  
And tangle up their dithering skeins of light.

O memory, take and keep  
All that my eyes, your servants, bring you home!  
    Thick through the changing year  
The unexpected, rich-charged moments come,  
    That you 'twixt wake and sleep  
In the lids of the closed eyes shall make appear.

This is life's certain good,  
Though in the end it be not good at all,  
    When the dark end arises  
And the stripped, startled spirit must let fall  
    The amulets that could  
Prevail with life's but not death's sad devices.

Then, like a child from whom an older child  
    Forces its gathered treasures,  
Its beads and shells and strings of withered flowers,  
    Tokens of recent pleasures,  
The soul must lose from eyes weeping and wild  
    Those prints of vanished hours.

## THE FARMER'S WIDOW

THE old farmer failed and had to sell his land  
But kept the house his life-time and his widow's.  
He died at last. The unmarried daughter came  
To live at home. The house is like a boat  
Fallen from a foundering ship and washed ashore  
In unfamiliar fields, beyond the beach,  
Useless and unapproached. The great cool dairy  
Is empty all the week, the labourers  
Elsewhere receive their wage on Saturdays.  
Here live these women in the midst of fields  
Which all their lives long they have called their

own,

But where their favourite paths are all ploughed

up,

Their favourite hedge-gaps wired. The daughter

tries

To keep the garden tidy, but the lawn

Grows ranker and ranker, and on the garden

beds

Each year the barbarous thistle wins the match,  
And the red gravel of the drive which sweeps

Before the house is greener than a pond.  
The mother walks the lanes, grieving at change,

New milking sheds put up, the old barn pulled

down,

Fields under plumey maize, the hill-side fenced.

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But her grief is dry-eyed, until she finds  
Under an open shed a broken cart,  
One wheel off, canted dismal and forlorn,  
And under the new master's style she reads  
There in faint palimpsest her husband's name.

## ARMISTICE DAY, 1921

THE hush begins. Nothing is heard  
Save the arrested taxis throbbing  
And here and there an ignorant bird  
And here a sentimental woman sobbing.

The statesman bares and bows his head  
Before the solemn monument:  
His lips, paying duty to the dead  
In silence, are more than ever eloquent.

But ere the sacred silence breaks  
And taxis hurry on again,  
A faint and distant voice awakes,  
Speaking the mind of a million absent men:

"Mourn not for us. Our better luck  
At least has given us peace and rest.  
We struggled when our moment struck  
But now we understand that death knew best.

"Would we be as our brothers are  
Whose barrel-organs charm the town?  
Ours was a better dodge by far—  
We got *our* pensions in a lump sum down.

"We, out of all, have had our pay,  
There is no poverty where we lie:  
The graveyard has no quarter-day,  
The space is narrow but the rent not high.

"No empty stomach here is found:  
Unless some cheated worm complain  
You hear no grumbling underground:  
O, never, never wish us back again!

"Mourn not for us, but rather we  
Will meet upon this solemn day  
And in our greater liberty  
Keep silent for you, a little while, and pray."

## WINTER TREES

Is the tree's life in bearing leaves  
And flowers and fruit in turn? and may  
The voice that in dry branches grieves  
Be only the wind's going its way?

Those black boughs drawn on the white sky  
In stiff and intricate design—  
Does that substantial character  
Declare no real life within?

If so, we men, what life have we  
When at the last we stand alone,  
Love, children, combat, poetry,  
And all our proud conceptions gone?

Still the unmoving winter trees  
Hold up the pure curves of their boughs,  
Forms clothing calm immortal life  
No change of time or state can rouse.

THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

*To H. C. Harwood*

## ARGUMENT

*It was foretold by the oracle that Achilles, son of the sea-goddess Thetis, and of Peleus, King of Thessaly, should have a glorious life but an early and violent death. When the Greek chieftains prepared their expedition against Troy, his mother, hoping to avert this doom, conveyed him to Scyros, where she hid him among the maidens of the island, disguised by her enchantments as one of them. It was also foretold that the Greeks should not take Troy without the help of Achilles, and Ulysses was therefore sent to find him out, which he did by means of a trick. During his concealment on the island Achilles loved Deidamia, the king's daughter, who afterwards bore him a son.*



## PROLOGUE

IN the world's huge and teeming memory  
Nothing is lost. There is a realm behind  
The cloud-veil of the tense and reasoning brain,  
Which in the wind of ecstasy to and fro  
Floats with inconstant motion. In that kingdom  
The dreams of earlier dreamers with our own  
Are mixed and made one substance, and in dreams  
We too can move there, shadowlike and dim,  
Seeing around us figures of more life  
Than ordinary light reveals; and nought  
Is there forbid to any questioner  
Whom labouring man brings forth, though dull  
his vision

And the clear instinct with much knowledge  
clogged

And turned to creeping ignorance. So we,  
A mingled blood, but yet not wiser thence,  
Having the distant levels of the earth  
Constricted to the perfect round and frame  
Of our own narrow, all-embracing minds,  
Look back in poor humility—as one  
Out of the cramping wisdom of middle age  
Upon the child's airy, blue-vaulted dreams,  
Seeing there wisdom more than life hath since  
Given to his years, how many they may be—  
So we look back and in that world of youth,

## THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

Which seems a mirror made by happier hands,  
Can see ourselves freed from time's accidents,  
That world of youth, when imagination free  
Like a clear wax took true impress of life  
And the sharp images preserved till now.  
These the world's memory, our larger self,  
Will not sequester from us, being ours,  
So long as we, peering among the shadows,  
Can find there comelier pictures of ourselves.

Men wax and wane upon the enduring earth;  
Their buildings like a season-flowering weed  
Flicker across her crumbling ribs of land,  
Rise and are gone and rise and go again;  
And if an angel should incline his head  
To watch the curious globe he might perceive  
An endless movement seeming to bring forth  
Nothing. Yet the pale, active flame of life  
That plays upon the surface of the earth  
Hath wonders greater than the heavens bred,  
Nobility out of rebellious flesh  
And honour out of animal desires.  
These in eternal being are preserved  
And grow in numbers as the æons go,  
Taking the race of man  
Only a little from its recent birth,  
In beastly appetites and beastly ruts,  
Stiffly contending with the other beasts.  
But if I move the mirror's veil I see  
The vast expanse before my shrinking eyes,  
Cloudy and affrighting with the age-dim shapes  
That stir and take new life. What then am I?  
And what the mirror? Are we separate?

For in my breast these figures move and live  
That here I see, and also I with them  
Suffer and struggle in the mirror's depths  
Among the mists and lights of earlier time.  
And what is this familiar voice that speaks  
In tones like mine, yet with a nobler ring,  
Spelling the deeds that in the glass are done,  
With words which doubtfully I apprehend,  
The sense half-caught, the music out of tune?

Which seems a mirror made by happier hands,  
Can see ourselves freed from time's accidents,  
That world of youth, when imagination free  
Like a clear wax took true impress of life  
And the sharp images preserved till now.  
These the world's memory, our larger self,  
Will not sequester from us, being ours,  
So long as we, peering among the shadows,  
Can find there comelier pictures of ourselves.

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## THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

HARDLY the first sweet day of sun and showers  
On which with dewy lashes the world awakes  
And in the pale glass of the stretchèd sky,  
Misty with her own tears, sees blurred and dim  
Her half-forgotten youth—hardly that day  
Had stepped from troubled wave to quiet wave  
Before the maidens of the island learnt  
They had a new companion. She was tall  
And fashioned with a grave and queenly beauty  
Wherein the darkness of a grief to come  
Shone deep but lustrous, as upon the sand  
Of shallow seas on clear and windless days  
The shadow of the boat deepens, not flaws,  
The watery light. She met them silently,  
And when they asked her name she answered,  
Stranger,  
But told not who had brought her there or whence.  
All knew a lady had been deep engaged  
Through the whole day in secret with the king  
And with the rustic lords who counselled him,  
But none had seen her come or go. One said  
There had been fluting in the morning wind  
And stir of waters and a breeze that ran  
Against the season's drift at touch of dawn  
And strewed in the cool air a tingling music  
Like fingers playing on a glass's rim.

One said that in her father's house at noon  
 She had passed the coolest chamber where the  
     light

Through the rush-woven hangings never came,  
 And staying her bare feet by the shadowed entry  
 Had seen pale radiance lying in a pool  
 Upon the trodden floor, and faintly heard  
 Her father's voice answering another voice  
 That uttered, like a wind on ruffling water,  
 Delicate syllables. And in truth there was  
 A presence on the island all that day  
 And all that night. The simple island lords,  
 Who ruled a land as peaceful as themselves,  
 Careful to have the granges full of corn,  
 The goat-skins plump with wine, the flocks and  
     herds

Guarded and tended to a due increase,  
 Showed in their eyes, like a reflected light,  
 Serenity, and in their bearing peace,  
 And in their speech a cadence tranquil  
 Than they had used before. Another told  
 How the next day she had drowsed upon her bed  
 About the dawn, poised between sleep and waking,  
 And seen or dreamt (for when full morning came  
 She knew not which) a rosy shape that drew  
 Over the ripples to the sea's red verge,  
 Couched in a rosy shell, with dolphin-teams  
 And scaly-skinned outriders on the backs  
 Of great sea-horses, blowing in resonant conches  
 A deep-breath'd tune, like noise of boisterous  
     waves

Which in full sunshine on a rocky coast  
 Prolong their turmoil when the storm is done

And seem in play to mock their late arouse.  
 While from her window these she watched, she  
     heard

A crying from wild ocean rise in answer  
 And saw the rosy shell fade in the dawn  
 That flowered upon the sea. Or did a cloud,  
 The sun's first messenger, dipped in his colours,  
 Melt in his fiery breathing as he rose?  
 And was that clamour only the first wind  
 That moves at dawn and from the light-thrilled air  
 Draws a faint melody? She did not know,  
 For while she watched with elbows on the sill  
 Sleep soothed her eyes again. She woke to find  
 Sky, sea and light and air and nothing more,  
 Save in her thoughts a half-forgotten dream.

The island Scyros floated on the sea  
 And in the water shone her crags and towers,  
 A second self existing in the wave,  
 Mysterious and lovely, like the double  
 Which, as some yet believe for comfort's sake,  
 Attends each man from birth to death, remaining  
 What in a kinder world he might have been.  
 But few in Scyros were the flaws and scars  
 Which the transmuting mirror-sea might smooth,  
 And in that summer Thetis' blessing lay  
 Especially upon her. Fishermen  
 Thanked the sea-goddess for continual calm  
 That lulled their storm-washed vessels near the  
     rocks  
 And herded in their nets the plenteous fish.  
 The farmers watched their fields grow day by day  
 More fruitful, and the vines under the sun



More prosperously ripen to the vintage,  
 Unvexed by creeping rot or summer tempest.  
 Nor wolf nor murrain did the shepherd plague  
 And on his thyme-grown hills he slept at night,  
 Close by the dew-pond's green and glimmering  
     round,

While all about him slept the peaceful flock  
 Like white stones under the distant, kindly stars.  
 But not alone did the tame things increase  
 For man's provision. In the dells and brakes  
 The vines that bear the wild tart fruit grew heavy  
 Early in summer, and along the ground  
 Trailed with their load, not waving free in air.  
 And for the maidens there were many flowers,  
 Wild orchids rising in the broad-leafed grass  
 And pale wood-lilies lighting all the hills  
 And bells, as plenty as the ocean's fish,  
 That seemed to run in shoals before the wind.  
 These were the island's wealth and luxury  
 Wherewith gay summer filled her spreaded skirts.

A constant weather shed bright influence  
 Upon the life of man, and day by day  
 The sea-wind blew unswerving, fresh and mild,  
 And on his airy billows bore the clouds  
 That sometimes melted in a fruitful shower.  
 But never was the earth with moisture soaked  
 To rot the full-eared corn in ripening month,  
 Nor ever were the maidens from their tasks  
 In field or garden or on tawny beach,  
 Or from the games that followed the light task,  
 By storms untimely or long rains withheld.  
 There is in maidenhood a subtle strength

Reserved, as if a rift in mountains tall  
Should catch the waters of a hasty spring  
And hold them peaceful in her lap of stone  
One moment, while the sky and leaning flowers  
Are mirrored in the floods and make them lovely,  
Before they hurry down the side again,  
To grow, and take the soilure of their course,  
Doing the work of water on the earth.

These that the island nourished needed not  
A goddess' blessing on the year to make them  
More beautiful, to round the child's thin limbs,  
To ripen the lean side, and the slant breast  
Curve out in fullness. They were nature's foison,  
The flower on mankind's tree, as brief as fair,  
The foam-wreath on the restless tide of life,  
Whose bubbles rise and break and rise again,  
As fugitive and as eternal they.

And who beheld them, youth or graybeard worn  
Or child or nursing-mother, felt in them  
The magic moment when the race of man  
Poises in gathered strength before fulfilment  
And turns to beauty. Not least lovely there,  
The Stranger, tall of limb and bright of eye  
And proud of carriage, joined them in their tasks,  
Willing, and meek in answer when she earned  
Reproaches of the quicker-handed girls,  
And friendly in her looks, though on her brow  
Cloudlike a constant sadness weighed, as if  
Knowledge mixed there with wonder. In their  
games

She was the better player. When they ran  
With skirts trussed up she outran them easily,  
And she was quicker with the tossing ball.

Even their youthful leader she outstripped,  
Deidamia, daughter of the king,  
Their fellow, though the daughter of the king,  
And only by her beauty and her wit  
The chief among them, who, till this the first  
In race and game, was by the Stranger's mien  
Of gentleness and friendliness so pleased  
That earliest among them sprang her joy  
To greet the new companion and to guide  
Her steps unpractised in their well-known paths.  
But after they had played one hour away  
Suddenly fear possessed them, and they shrank  
From touching her or being touched by her,  
Compelled by what strange chastity they knew not,  
So that a soberness upon them fell  
And hushed their laughter, and their lifted arms  
Bound to their sides and darkened their bright eyes.  
It was as though a wandering god had plunged  
Deep fathoms from his castle in the sky  
Into earth's thicker air and flying slow  
Had paused on shining-feathered vans to watch  
So lovely a gathered garland of mortal flowers,  
Which—as the shadow of the hawk afield  
Frightens the birds to silence—so these maids  
Stilled in their merriment and turned to marble.  
The game was stayed. The lightly bouncing ball  
Bounced into rest upon the sunny ground  
And lay there motionless. The ring of girls  
Stared each at other, dumbly asking whence  
The influence came that thus affrighted them;  
And none gave answer. Only in mockery  
Echo among the hills drew slowly away,  
Breathing soft repetitions of the laughter

That long had ceased. A heavy silence lay  
Upon the plat of grass that late with sound  
Bubbled and overflowed. Then one by one,  
Each loosed her still and rigid attitude;  
One bent her waist, and one the attentive head  
Lowered, and one the stiffly pointing arm  
Let flex again. But still the silence brooded  
Over them all, as though they had been in truth  
But rooted flowers, which have no other voice  
Save what the winds and ever-voyaging bees  
Create among their leaves. Thus from the depths  
Of sense unconscious rose an airy thought  
To warn them of a peril not yet seen  
And nameless. But the Stranger gazed around  
The troubled faces, hers grown darker still,  
And raised her arms, as if imploring pity,  
And slowly let them fall again. She saw,  
One after one, the shadowed glances turn  
And rest on her in mute distrust. Then she  
Breathed deep a sigh of melody forlorn,  
As sigh the woods when over darkening hills  
Come the first streamers of a storm foreknown,  
And to the nearest, grown within that hour  
Her friend, who but that moment played with her  
And with her made one moving form of grace,  
Addressed her sole appeal, silent and wan,  
Already hopeless. Deidamia gazed  
Down on the grass with veiled, unanswering look,  
As though the life and friendliness that played  
But lately on her lips and in her eyes  
Like a wild wood-thing to some secret hole  
At sound of footsteps in the wood were gone.  
Not to the rest the Stranger raised her eyes

But staring downward hid the unusual tears  
And with a strangled gesture of her hands  
Turned quick away. They saw her form recede  
Among the olives, up the terraced hill,  
The white skirt fluttering from step to step,  
Climbing the zigzag path. Then, all confused,  
Again they essayed the interrupted game,  
Took up the idle ball and listlessly  
Threw it from hand to hand. But as they played  
The unknown influence that frightened them  
Surged newly bodied from the troubled depths  
Of maiden sense and trammelled their quick wrists  
And hooded their clear eyes and in their thoughts  
Dazzled like summer lightning faint and soft  
That ripens the green corn on starry nights.

Meanwhile on furthest mountain out of sight  
The young Achilles, stripped of maiden's dress,  
Ran like a flame. Ant, spider, lizard, snake  
Paused in their busyness among the rocks  
To see him go. Along the narrow path,  
Seldom by any trodden, overgrown  
With spiky bramble and the stinging nettle  
And binding trails of many a creeping flower,  
He leapt unheeding and his naked limbs  
Were coursed by rivulets of sweat and blood.  
His teeth firm clenched, his nostrils open wide,  
His eyes delighted by the wind he made,  
He ran and ran untiring. Far below  
The tiny people shrank to insect mould,  
The sheltered harbour dwindled to a toy,  
And soon the highest terraces of vines  
Were left behind, and among burning crags

And suddenly the air was still and cool.  
Below him far, a bird on bough unseen  
Raised a night anthem in sweet jets of sound,  
And further still, beyond the edge of foam,  
A little boat, as little as a leaf,  
Rocked on the falling swell, and from the bow  
A kneeling fisherman dipped in the wave  
His knotted line and watched, with back intent,  
While his companion with slow-moving oar  
Kept equal head against the gentle tide.

Thereafter, mild and grave and unaroused,  
In female robes again the Stranger went  
Among the maidens with averted head  
And did her tasks with them but not resumed  
The sweet companionship of race and game.  
And long long day added to long long day  
In summer's fragrant count. But all that year  
The young in Scyros, like the trodden grass,  
Which, when the heel is lifted, lifts again  
A green untamèd head towards the sun,  
Seeing thus by plenty life's oppressive heel  
Raised for a season, raised themselves in joy  
And stretched out greedy hands to pick the flower  
That might not blow again. But so it was  
That when the pot of pleasure came to boil  
Youth turned to maid and with persuasive lips  
Demanded what she gave not. She, aloof,  
Passed by his prayer as though she heard it not,  
And held in thought another, dimmer goal  
Than such embraces as in earlier day  
Herself and him begot. For each to each,  
Working in pairs or resting through noon's heat

Or waking double-bedded on airless nights,  
The maidens owned, stumbling and wanting  
words,

How each was haunted by a misty shade,  
Real but featureless. And, this confessed,  
Each from her sister turned, repenting it,  
To hide the blush that showed but chastity  
And yet seemed full of shame. And each alone  
Considered what her sister said, and dreamed  
That better she could see, although not say,  
The vision far removed. But in their dances  
Ringed on the green and in their skipping games  
A spirit ghosted them as not before  
And turned them from the joys of human maids  
To bodiless imaginings. They grew  
All through that summer like a race apart,  
Yet not the less fulfilled of grace and joy  
Which unknown longing lit to deeper hue,  
Like lightning playing in a distant cloud  
Whose edges still are bright with sunset's rose.  
No more by garden, hill or lonely shore  
Deidamia led a romping train  
To do their daily tasks or play or swim;  
No more on island feast and holiday  
She loosed them laughing in the happy crowd  
To find new partners who their supple forms  
In game or dance with rougher grip might hold  
Yet not in arms less loving. When the ship  
Out of the uncharmed world beyond the rim  
Of visible ocean glided smoothly in,  
Unlooked for but most welcome, and the people  
Came down rejoicing to the waterside  
And ringed about the unknown voyagers,

As naked as himself in joy he ran,  
Till on the topmost rock where the last pine,  
Scorched by the summer, by the winter gales  
At every gust unsettled, grimly clings  
To bare and dismal life, he paused and fell  
Headlong upon the stone and felt its roughness  
Pleasantly hot against his heated flesh.  
Then he knew nothing but content. His blood,  
That swept in race through every stretching vein,  
Drowned the wild murmur of the lonely heart  
With thunderous echoes in his bursting ears,  
And the tired muscles of his youthful limbs  
Ached keener as he lay than did the thoughts  
That late perplexed his spirit. Soon, too soon,  
The gasping breath grew calmer and the blood  
Ran not so hastily. Thus on a night,  
When loud gales shake the mountains and their  
shouts

Ring on in tumult through the echoing arches  
Of bursting heaven, no voice but theirs is heard;  
But when they cease, when gradually the sky  
Appeases her tempestuous children, then  
Out of the spreading silence comes a voice  
To take possession of the empty air,  
The still complaining brook, from shelf to shelf  
Falling in thin-toned misery which seems  
To fill the listening world as not the storm.  
Achilles wept. The sudden smarting tears  
That sprang into his eyes astonished him;  
And there, alone or watched by humble things  
In whose pure spirits reason was not quick  
To mock at grief, he let them fall unstopped  
And eased his suffering. But when he looked



Down through the mist of olive-leaves and boughs  
That clothed the mountain-side, the sea shone soft,  
A smoky blue, whereon the sun's light glinted  
And waves broke idly round a pointed reef.  
Then on his knees he raised himself and stretched  
Strong arms to the kind ocean, crying aloud,  
"Mother, arise! Sweet mother, from the sea,  
Where with thy flowers the swell is garlanded,  
Arise and comfort me! Why was I born  
To suffer thus in exile? Must I dwell  
Far from my home among a foreign race  
And exiled from myself in these false robes,  
Kept from the emulations of my youth,  
Its triumphs, sports and dangers, like a girl?  
Truly the oracle has injured me,  
Not only now in seeing my young death,  
But first when it ordained that Peleus' son  
Should have immortal substance in his flesh:  
For who but one that hath unearthly power  
Could make that possible which should not be  
Or deceive any by so gross a trick?  
Who but a goddess, moved by immortal wishes,  
Could so mistake the human blood that runs  
About my body, and my mortal wish  
Thus by divine un pitying logic thwart?"  
Thus, thus, he cried; and still no answer came,  
And still his bosom rose rebelliously,  
And still with angry glances gazed he out  
Upon his mother's barren, lovely realm,  
His mouth awry, his cheeks, 'twixt rage and  
yearning,  
Fiery or wet. At last behind his back  
The sun dipped underneath a neighbour peak

And suddenly the air was still and cool.  
Below him far, a bird on bough unseen  
Raised a night anthem in sweet jets of sound,  
And further still, beyond the edge of foam,  
A little boat, as little as a leaf,  
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And ringed about the unknown voyagers,

The maids, withdrawn behind the shouting folk,  
Like clouds indeed, ranked in the upper sky,  
That in their bosoms hold the needed rain,  
Aloof and lovely, wandered out of reach,  
And like a summer cloud their shadow threw,  
Cool but not dark upon the lively earth.  
But soon to them, mustered beyond the throng,  
Half hidden in the melting airs of day  
That deepened towards night on land and sea,  
There came a voice, a strange appealing voice,  
That moved them inwardly they knew not how,  
And with the rustle and sheen of spreaded stuffs  
Thrown on the grass, and many a gem displayed,  
Drew them to sidle through the crowd and view  
The vessel's cargo. Long and long they gazed,  
Charmed by the tongue that wove an airy web  
About their spirits; and the Stranger too,  
Drawn in among them, gazed with empty eyes  
On robes and scarves, till on the growing pile  
With careless hand and half-averted look  
The merchant threw a sword. An ancient sword  
Sank in a bed of softly yielding silks  
And lay there darkly gleaming. On the blade  
Old grooves left keen and sharp the shearing edge:  
The hilt, by many a hand-grip worn and smooth,  
Spoke the embrace of battling fingers clenched  
Often in noble rage or the desperate  
Frenzy of beaten men who dreaded death  
Or the cold iron will of slayers set  
Upon their fellows' end. These, like a swarm  
Of ghosts that from the enchanter's eery glass  
The unwary words call forth, rose from the blade  
And steamed into the Stranger's smarting eyes,

So that her own stretched hand she could not see  
Which the hilt drew towards it. But her flesh  
Felt that compulsion in the tendons fine  
And in her veins again the blood at war,  
Desire with resolution, vow with wish,  
Storming between the unused banks. And then,  
Unwilling and regretted, the gesture made  
Its own completion and an act was born,  
Not ever from the world to be effaced  
With all its consequence of deed and thought.  
The hand that quickly from the hilt recoiled  
Could never be the same again, the nerves  
That henceforth should its fearful power direct  
Were in their deep mysterious root transformed.  
Nothing she cared who watched. Herself she saw  
In her own spirit something rise and bud,  
Suddenly swelling, and the sheath of dreams  
Break into curling-up and withered leaves  
To let that strange flower of the future through,  
A blossom which with petals sombrely red  
Presaged wild deeds, fruition of desire,  
And after fruiting done a something else  
Dark to foresee but heavy with a sense  
Of weariness and blame and shame and tears.  
This gloomed in her wide eyes and hid the scene,  
Hid her companions, unawakened still,  
Busy in dream with toy and ornament,  
And hid the sideways glance that fixed on her  
In triumph. Hardly, when that voice began  
Low in her ear, like mutter of a stream  
Heard by the night-bewildered wanderer  
Deep in a misty wood, who knows the marsh  
Deadly to straying feet—hardly she knew

Whence that doom-heavy soft persuasion came,  
 From lips without or the unsuspected thought  
 New-wakened in her heart with serpent-tongue,  
 Calling the virgin spirit out of childhood  
 To life and death and more than life or death.  
 Dumbly she listened, but as one who looks,  
 Not listens, with taut sense and straining eyes,  
 Then with a muttered word, "To-morrow!" turned  
 Towards the mountain, where the tumbled crags  
 And huge still woods seemed in the darkening air  
 To spread their darker selves and stain the sky  
 With deeper hue about them. As she turned,  
 She saw with outward sight, that nothing sees,  
 Another glance beseeching her. It passed  
 As fades the bird's quick shadow on the field  
 When a cloud overtakes it. Through the people  
 With stumbling feet and distant gaze she went.

This day was summer's harshest on the isle:  
 Her breath lay heavy in the stubble field  
 And field unreaped where stood the toppling ears  
 And every vineyard where the clusters gloomed,  
 Full-globèd shadows in the still-hung leaves;  
 And every stone upon the shore rayed back  
 Dull months-collected heat in stirless air  
 Among the maidens. They about the show  
 Still packed with swelling whispers and quick  
     hands,  
 And felt slow moisture down their bodies run,  
 Stand on their foreheads and make lank their curls,  
 Till one raised up her eyes, and on her cheek  
 A faint breath smote with cold, awakening touch.  
 Low her voice sounded in the hubbub soft

And yet so deep that each her whispering ceased  
 And looked, and saw upon the sea's far edge  
 The sunset like a wavering curtain hung  
 To hide the unknown. Soft rose, smoky and soft,  
 Spread out across the sky a melting scroll  
 And underneath, a cloud, loose-edged and dim,  
 Rode on the water. Thence the wind blew chill,  
 Fingered their faces, pushed their tresses back  
 And laid the airy garments cold and close  
 Against their shivering and reluctant flesh.  
 Away from them, alone, the Stranger paused  
 High on the shoulder of the stony hill,  
 And looking eastward as they west, beheld  
 At vision's limit, poised in crystal air,  
 The phantom of a mountain-range, whose base  
 Sprang out of vapour, but whose floating peaks  
 Threw back in broken gold the sun's last light.  
 Dazzled she stood and stared. The mountains swam  
 Like rainbowed ice afloat on Arctic seas,  
 Impalpable, but sharp of edge and colour,  
 One moment, and the next dissolved in shade,  
 Gone like a glowing cloud that winds disperse;  
 And darkness from that first drowned point came  
 on,  
 Hurrying on to cover all the world.

Again Achilles laid upon the rock  
 His maiden garments, now with sad contempt  
 Yet something new of sorrow in the touch  
 That needlessly made smooth their tumbled folds.  
 Then, like the rising of the winter sun,  
 Burning but sullen-hued, out of pale clouds,  
 The hero's body rose, from that eclipse

For ever freed. Now up the deep ravines  
That clove the mountain, and the hollow paths  
That scaled her flanks, flowed darkness like a tide  
And the long grass streamed out invisibly  
Like seaweed under the slow-swelling wave.  
Far from the fitful lights and voices loud  
Achilles came with heavy lagging step  
Up the ascent. His feet the pollen brushed  
From pale, night-waking flowers and murmured on  
Through weeds by summer's heat made harsh and  
dry,

As though earth's spirit in the stillness breathed  
A nervous deep unrest. Heavy he trod  
And paused at every turning of the path  
And took the next step upward with a sigh.  
And often as he went he looked behind  
As though in quivering bough and air-tossed leaf  
Were whispers of an unknown follower.  
But closer still thought's dark pursuers came,  
Spirits new waking and agog to form  
Themselves strong bodies from the smoking blood  
His hand was now to spill, and from his own  
That after must be spilt. At last he stayed  
Under an olive-tree and sinking down  
Bowed his hot forehead into cramped hands,  
Feeling a little world whose pulses beat  
Like earthquakes or annihilating wars.  
About his seat the creatures of the night  
Sought each a weaker, and the ancient rocks  
Saw many a scene of tiny battle and death.  
After an hour was gone he raised his head,  
Hearing, he thought, once more below the crag  
The quiet water washing on a reef



Which in the silence grew, until it seemed,  
Close in his ear, but in no human tongue,  
A gentle voice speaking strange words of peace.  
"Mother," he cried, "it is your voice. O, use  
The speech I know!" No answer came to him:  
But when the echoes of his cry had fallen  
Like stricken birds from dark crag to dark sea,  
He spoke again: "Mother, was it from this  
You hid me, not my own longings, my own dreams?  
These were the deeds I dreamt of—to make cause  
With the shrill cuckold for the magic harlot  
And slay innocent men! Now I can see  
What it is that must die before my death,  
Eaten at the root before the arrow strikes.  
I cry to you as not before, for then  
I accused the kind, unknowing deity  
That saw the motions of my human heart  
As I have watched the toad's dull pulsing throat  
In ignorance and love. Now I implore  
Your strength against the thing you feared for me!  
For this dark fate that points out the forked way  
Loves not nor hates, but knows, and in my brain  
Has sown a dreadful guessing. Shall I become  
An airy bubble, empty, round and gay,  
That leaves not even a stain upon the earth,  
Or the gross meat which day by day my fellows  
Pass through dishonouring stomachs for their food?  
How should I choose between them if I must?  
Yet as I speak my choice is made." The sea,  
Moaning about the eternal base below,  
Spread through the air a voice of sad assent  
That gripped his heart and in the grip gave peace,  
The peace of things resolved, not to be changed.

Deep grew the darkness where he stood. The moon,  
Arising softly from a couch of cloud,  
Lightened the hill-side here and there, and cast  
On every shadowed place a thicker shade.  
Within that veil Achilles stood obscured,  
Numb at the heart, but all Achilles now,  
For now from him a last enchantment fell,  
Leaving him strong and sad. Out of the world  
Faded at last the semblance he had borne,  
Vanished as vanishes a happy dream  
Which at the menace of inbreaking day  
Still shields the sleeper from the cruel sun.  
Gone was the Stranger. Whither? Ask as well  
Where the flower's beauty goes when petals fade  
And the rough seed thrusts out. Yet it may be  
That still a spirit haunts the isle, a ghost  
Of dew and light and air, revisiting  
The beach where long ago the maidens played,  
And finds perhaps in some far, narrow vale  
The rude grave of a poet, dead too young,  
Whom death, or life, frustrated of his hope,  
Presses her faint lips to the soil and breathes  
One word of half-remembered sisterhood.  
But these are dreams. Out of the breathing world  
Long, long ago that semblance fled away,  
Past any summons, even of the sweetest mouth  
To which it once had answered. Now in vain  
Those patient feet climbed the rough path, in vain  
Deidamia through the olive-trees,  
A slip of white that dimly drifted on  
Like sunshine pale in sea-abysms drowned,  
Searched groping and astray. In vain she called,  
Bidding the lost companion answer her—

Too late the summons spoken to a wraith.  
Yet a receding whisper trembled out  
As though the air had spoken or the leaves  
Had lent a voice to the unbodied spirit  
To breathe an inarticulate farewell.  
Gladly she answered and again came on  
And by the darkness where the hero stood,  
Only a shadow paler than the rest,  
Troubled that shadow with her gentle plea:  
"Why do you shun us, Stranger? Have we not  
Long since repented, though in looks not words,  
The wrong we did you? We were cruel and strange,  
Knowing not why, not knowing we were so,  
But moved by something hidden in ourselves  
That never stirred before. It was not unkindness  
Turned me from you and soured my friendly heart  
But kindness too sudden in my breast. O, say,  
What serpent raised its head 'twixt you and me  
And stung the hands held out in growing love?"  
She paused, and in her voice the tears welled high  
Like an encroaching wave that fails again  
Before the brink. "Why are you strange to us?  
What wakes in us a thing so long unknown  
To sudden aching life? Before you came  
We lived together, maidens without thought,  
As though the rolling world its axle stayed  
And time forebore to trouble us. But now  
The emblems of our dream grow real and harsh,  
Our peace becomes a smarting restlessness.  
Return to us, return, and we with games  
And gentle love will woo you to ourselves  
And all shall be with us as once it was.  
Will you not come with me? Can you not give

Again what I at first refused?" He stood  
As rigid as a cypress-tree at noon  
When all the mountain sleeps and on her side  
The woods are breathless. Then with painful cry  
At one step from the thicket he advanced  
And in the moonlight tall and naked appeared,  
Saying with harsh, loud voice, "I am Achilles!"  
Whereat the girl moaned low, shrinking aside,  
And all life's terror flickered in her gaze.  
He bent his straining body down to her,  
She winced away still more on powerless knees,  
And thus they stayed unmoving. The night stilled  
Her wandering airs and every jiggling leaf  
Hung quiet on the stalk. Nothing was heard,  
Save from the girl a deep and labouring breath  
That broke into a sob and died away  
And left a quivering horror in the darkness  
When silence rose about the frozen pair.  
Until at last Achilles spoke again,  
Like thunder speaking on the cloudy hill  
To dwellers in the valley far below,  
Distant, deliberate and dreadful. "You  
Shrink now from truth as once from lies. I have  
looked  
Truth in the face and seen a fearful thing,  
Not what we think—yet I am not afraid."  
He ceased. Again the echo died. The girl  
Raised her sunk face with wrung and questioning  
look,  
As though upon his breast was written a word,  
Where the hard answer to all questions lay,  
Which she spelt slowly out. Upon her brow  
The weight of unexpected knowledge grew

As hard a weight to carry as may be  
 In mortal womb the progeny of a god.  
 Yet never did the proud and stem-straight neck  
 Sway at the burden; and in those wide eyes  
 Horror gave way to wonder, wonder drew in  
 A sharp and dolorous ecstasy. At last  
 He, bending down, another answer read  
 To his own cry. There was in their embrace  
 No kindness nor no pleasure, but the strength  
 Of floods unloosened, as their spirits rose  
 Dizzy and blind through the void fields of night.  
 O stars, shine kindly on them, and, dark earth,  
 Breathe all your thick and friendly odours up  
 About their bed, the smell of well-dunged fields  
 Ready to bear new harvests and the smell  
 Of cattle stalled in comfortable byres,  
 Mixed with the keener scents of transient flowers,  
 That drift, a natural incense, on the hills;  
 And you, dim forest on the mountain side,  
 Receive among the noises of the night  
 That cry of bodily pain and let it fall  
 Into the silence with the fox's bark  
 And scarce-heard whimper of the netted hare.

When the slow morning came, the crawling sun  
 Appeared behind a heavy bank of cloud  
 And threw a gray and level flood of light  
 Towards the island; and the hero's arm  
 Threw a distincter shadow on the breast  
 That panted soft beneath it into peace.  
 He raised himself a little, and with voice  
 That dawn's mysterious hush made thin and  
 still

Murmured, "The night is over, I must go!"  
 Then with convulsive grasp of his strong arms  
 He raised her to him, and his anxious mouth  
 Sought on her quiet lips, cold cheeks, dark lids,  
 A further tenderness night had not shown.  
 He found not what he sought, or, if he found,  
 Found also in that sweet such bitter taste  
 As checked the crowding kisses. Through his  
 tears

That ached unshed he saw her resting body  
 Blurred with unsteady light. He closed his eyes  
 And in his heart wild lamentation rose,  
 A jarred and dissonant music that bewailed  
 Their two defeated lives. O, for the world  
 Of dreams and unawaked enchantment still!  
 Already on her smooth brow and lineless cheeks,  
 Forewritten in a ghostly character,  
 Age, sorrow and deception and the shame  
 Of hopes forsaken grinned at him. He knew,  
 His loth flesh crawling at the touch, that now  
 The hateful pencil wrote upon his skin  
 Its mocking message—not the same, for age  
 Had no part in it. This was truth indeed,  
 Which he had seen, he boasted, without fear,  
 But dim and veiled, not in particular shape.  
 He winced unbearably, his spirit felt,  
 Grinding and harsh, the stirring of that truth,  
 Too like the pangs of motherhood which soon  
 Deidamia's body must convulse,  
 Being to her then, deserted and alone,  
 The sole remembrance of this night, their love.  
 He groaned, but at the sound she raised her  
 eyes,

Answering him only with a long, slow look  
Deep in his own, which gazed at her and shed  
Their burning hunger and unrest, until  
They mirrored pure the mournful peace of hers,  
The peace of things fulfilled, deep beyond joy.

## EPILOGUE

How many sailors in how many ships  
Have lifted questing sail on what wide seas  
To find the islands of the blest, where dwell  
The kings whom earth remembers gratefully  
Because they raised a little from her breast  
The base and struggling children of her love  
And made her dust a little more than dust!  
How many sails in what deep seas have drowned,  
Seeking the islands of the blest where yet  
No fortunate explorer dropped his line,  
Sounding the channel to that haven still!  
For thence no sailor yet has come to tell  
How on a day his ship the landfall made  
And how the crew set foot on smiling shore  
To taste the bounty of the fruitful isles.  
No sailor yet in taverns by the sea  
Taught any other how to set a course  
And find again the islands of the blest.  
Dim in blue distances they gleam and drown  
Beyond the sight of ships, and there in peace  
Achilles reigns, cleansed from the soils of life,  
A bright and radiant spirit as he was  
Ere life began for him, and there he wields  
His now untarnished sceptre. Far away  
They lie from all attainment, save in sleep,  
His in the chartless oceans of the mind.

*May Day, PORTOFINO—Christmas Day, LEWES, 1920*



1922-1924

## WOODLAND SCENE

Run on, young rivulet, to no river going,  
Though Thames here sucks the pap, thou  
feed'st him not;

So slender is thy trickle that its flowing  
Stirs not the bramble-leaves that in it rot.

Yet in the stream my hand may paddle and make  
Islands and dams to break or pen the flood,  
Or with a broken branch's rough end rake  
New channels two inches deep in sticky mud.

High up the bank among the trees she lies  
On bloomless violets and primroses,  
And to the shy woodpecker's shrill surprise  
Sings, laughing, scraps of mournful melodies.

"The Earl of Moray" and "The Unquiet Grave"—  
The sun makes gaudy chequers on her dress:  
Faint through her cheerful voice the old sorrows  
rave,  
So far and faint they sound like happiness.

Further along the bank the terrier scuffles,  
Yaps through the undergrowth in blundering  
haste,  
Stands at the burrow's mouth and barks and  
snuffles,  
Calling the rabbits to come out and be chased.

Now is the channel garnished for a yard:

The last note sounded, she pauses with a smile:

The dog above the burrow stands on guard:

All three are happy for this little while.

## WOMAN'S SONG

No more upon my bosom rest thee,  
Too often have my hands caressed thee,  
My lips thou knowest well, too well.  
Lean to my heart no more thine ear  
My spirit's hidden truth to hear  
—It has no more to tell.

In what dark night, in what strange night,  
Burnt to the butt the candle's light  
That lit our room so long?  
I do not know. I thought I knew  
How love could be both sweet and true,  
I also thought it strong.

Where has the flame departed, where  
Amid the waste of empty air  
Is that which dwelt with us?  
Was it a fancy? Did we make  
Only a show for dead love's sake,  
It being so piteous?

No more against my bosom press thee,  
Ask no more that my hands caress thee,  
Leave the sad lips thou hast known so well.  
If to my heart thou lean thine ear,  
There, grieving, thou wilt only hear  
Vain murmuring of an empty shell.

## FAREWELL

WHAT was it entered on the air this morning,  
Rattled the window, touched my sleeping face  
And woke me suddenly with vague, sweet warning  
Of something new along these muddy ways?

I must go out into the fields and wander,  
Whither I care not. Maybe I shall find  
Over the next brown hedge the eternal yonder,  
Which like a coloured shadow haunts the mind.

Over the hedge the far hill mounteth steeply  
And on its side the trees are black and dead;  
Above, the crystal blue recedeth deeply,  
Whence float the great white cloud-shapes  
overhead.

Under the furthest cloud that now appears,  
Beyond the hill, there lies another vale,  
Where late the cloud hath dropt her gentle tears  
And April shadows wander, quick and pale.

And there already, so it seems, the boughs  
Are sparkling with half-opened buds, the sun  
Is spilt among the undergrowth and glows  
Kindly on spring so early-sweet begun.

Here, in the place we know, dark winter lingers,  
The ground within the grove is cold and wet;  
The wind around these walls with icy fingers  
Gropes for our shrinking hearts and finds them  
yet.

Here we were never happy. Here we said:  
To-morrow Spring will come and set us free—  
Sighed it at rising and on going to bed  
Searched the dumb dark for signs of ecstasy.

Little we knew, year after year were cheated,  
Saw doubting what was not, hoped for release,  
Found all our signs and omens uncompleted  
And sought at last in living death our peace.

But for us both beckoned the eternal yonder  
Over the next brown hedge. You whom I loved,  
We both, but not together now, must wander,  
In search of that far happiness unproved.

## A LONELY PLACE

THE leafless trees, the untidy stack,  
Last rainy summer raised in haste,  
Watch the sky turn from fair to black  
And watch the river fill and waste.

But never a footstep comes to trouble  
The rooks among the new-sown corn  
Or pigeons rising from late stubble  
And flashing lighter as they turn.

Or if a footstep comes, 'tis mine,  
Sharp on the road or soft on grass:  
Silence divides along my line  
And shuts behind me as I pass.

No other comes, no labourer  
To cut his shaggy truss of hay,  
Along the road no traveller,  
Day after day, day after day.

And even I, when I come here,  
Move softly on, subdued and still,  
Lonely as death, though I can hear  
Men shouting on the other hill.

Day after day, though no one sees,  
The lonely place no different seems,  
The trees, the stack, still images  
Constant in who can say whose dreams?



## THE WIND

Blow colder, wind, and drive  
My blood from hands and face nearer the heart.  
Cry over ridges and down tapering coombs,  
Carry the flying dapple of the clouds  
Over the grass, over the soft-grained plough,  
Stroke with your violent hand the hill's rough hair  
Against its usual set.

Snatch at the reins in my dead hands and push me  
Out of the saddle, blow my labouring pony  
Across the track. You only drive my blood  
Nearer the heart from face and hands and plant  
there,

Slowly burning, unseen, but alive and wonderful,  
A numb, confusèd joy!

This little world's in tumult. Far away  
The dim waves rise and wrestle with each other  
And fall down headlong on the beach. And here  
Quick gusts fly up the funnels of the valleys  
And meet their raging fellows on the hill-tops,  
And we are in the midst.

This beating heart, enriched with the hands' blood,  
Stands in the midst and feels the slow joy burn  
In solitude and silence, while all about  
The gusts clamour like living, crying birds  
And the gorse seems hardly tethered to the ground.  
Blow louder, wind, about

My square-set house, rattle the windows, lift  
The trap-door to the loft above my head  
And let it fall, clapping. Yell in the trees  
And throw the rotted oak-bough to the ground,  
Flog the dry trailers of my climbing rose—  
Make deep, O wind, my rest!

## RIDING ON THE DOWNS

STAND still a moment and listen. Cannot you hear  
A strange sound in the wind that whips at our  
faces?

Like drums and trumpets playing, now far, now  
near

—But why should a band come into these empty  
places?

Or how could we hear drums from the valley  
towns?

They are much too far. It must be the threshing  
air

Plunging mad in the hollow folds of the downs,  
Like a panicking beast whose leg is caught in a  
snare.

It is nothing. Ride on. And yet there again it went!

In that last blast which volleyed so overhead,  
Brassy and resonant music, now faint and spent,  
Now silent again as the sudden gust falls dead.

Ride on, ride on. Let us find a place that is still:

Down by the stacks to the bottom lead the way.

Hark! once more above us the airy trumpets thrill

—Who knows what other riders are out to-day?

## SONNET

YOUR heart burns into mine, mine into yours,  
As do the cold, unmoving elements  
When to their joy the chemist's will consents  
And from that flame some residue endures.  
Time and the world may part us—but what  
ensures

Earth's truest, holiest beauty? Sunrise burns,  
But the enflamèd vapour soon returns  
To pallid air, and wisdom love soon cures.

Nothing is lost. Time's the same moment still.  
Years may revolve and all we know may change,  
New loves your heart and mine, inconstant, fill,  
For time and the world will ever leave us free  
For grief and joy—but, far as our lives may range,  
What has been is, and cannot cease to be.

## IN THE ORCHARD

THE cherry, hardly paler than the sky,  
Lifts white-encrusted branches:  
The old mulberry, crouching like an animal,  
Puts on new leaves again.

Gently the ivory petals of the pear  
Rise in the wind and fall.  
The milky light spreads everywhere and makes  
No shadows in the orchard.

The trees are dumb, their swaying laughs at me,  
And voices not their own  
Come from the wind-shaken leaves. This is but  
music:  
It is not the trees that speak.

Like the eyes of a woman with child, their looks  
are proud  
And beautiful and unthinking:  
They have in them the strength of a million years.  
Untouched by any thought.

Already now behind the glistening petals,  
Slowly grow round and hard  
The fruit which will, within the sugary pulp,  
Hold the immortal seed.

The spirit of the season lingers here;  
Her shadow falls across  
My listless hand stretched out on the tepid earth.  
My heart trembles with longing.

My love is like a tree that blossoms duly,  
When comes her season round:  
Spirit, if aught thou heedest the prayers of men,  
Grant to my love a child.

## THE FOUNTAIN IN THE PINE FOREST

FAR off among those woods it rises  
More than a thousand miles from here:  
Some other eye it now surprises,  
Its rustling soothes another ear.

The woods each side were black and silent,  
The roads were dusty and blinding white:  
Down it, as down a narrow funnel,  
Came in full stream the noonday light.

The cart swayed over stone and rut:  
Huddled in hot, unhappy doze  
I drowsed along with eyes half shut,  
Desiring only the journey's close.

But suddenly we lurched and turned  
And, round the corner, bright and thin  
And cool in the sullen trees, there burned  
That fountain! And my breath drew in.

I woke and spoke, hushed in surprise.  
They did not hear. The cart went on.  
Still the glare dazzled in our eyes,  
The wheels ground harsh on rut and stone.

## FOUNTAIN IN THE PINE FOREST 355

Again we lurched and turned a corner.  
Laughing, the driver shook his rein  
And shouted something that went by me:  
I sank in my hot sleep again.

Far off among those woods it rises  
More than a thousand miles from here:  
Some other eye it now surprises,  
Its rustling soothes another ear.

How far away in time and distance  
Is that bright fountain left behind!  
Day after day its glimmering image  
Fades in the forests of the mind.



## A WOMAN, A DOG, AND A WALNUT TREE

LONG did I beat my walnut tree,  
The nuts that fell were few and bad;  
I dare not beat my dog, for he  
Can look at me with eyes too sad.

You, Doris, then? But if I do  
From your half-opening lips will fall  
Soft bursts of laughter, sweet and true,  
And mocking as the cuckoo's call.

For though no changing wind can miss you,  
In this at least you constant prove,  
Whether I storm at you or kiss you  
You mock my anger and my love.

So I will kiss you still or beat you,  
Since it can make no difference;  
Nor to be grave do I entreat you,  
Your laughter is my recompense.

## WOMEN AND HORSES

WHILE I was saddling her she tried to bite me  
A dozen times, and now I'm hardly mounted  
And feeling for the stirrup, she wants to fight me.

Look there! with rapid sideways steps uncounted  
She tried to brush me off against that wall,

And now she shies and plunges, bucks and rears:  
She feels her oats, my pony, that is all,

There's nothing, not even me, she hates or fears.  
We missed that lorry by a half an inch,

She hopes to get her head across the stubble:  
Bless you, you'd think she felt the girth-straps pinch:

That's not the trouble, though we shall have  
trouble.

But when we're on the turf I'll let her go  
And she'll be happy then and I shall too.

No wonder in her stable she found it slow,  
But if I'd left her there, I ask you who

Would have complained the more? She wants to  
run

And doesn't want it, since I want her to;  
And playing up is what she thinks is fun,

Until on turf there's something better to do.  
Come up, my darling, damn you! Steady, now,

Or else we shan't get anywhere to-day:  
We'll go with delicate steps around the plough

And then we're on the grass, and then away!

## THE EXCUSE

· LOVERS allege of ladies whom they love  
Beauty or virtue or most noble thought,  
And with ingenious arguments they prove  
Why they have chosen, who perhaps were  
caught.

No one of these excuses fits my mind  
But this, no doubt, will serve as well as any—  
In all things, and ourselves as well, we find  
The same reasons for laughter, and so many.

## THE LUCKY DAY

(Gliding competitions on Itford Hill, October 21, 1922)

COME down, belovèd, from the crowded hill:  
The darkening air grows chill,  
Though still the man-bird sways from spur to spur  
Triumphant in the dusk, and still below  
The motor-horns applaud with harsh hurray.  
We have seen Fokker going to and fro  
His patient hundred yards of conquered air  
And still at every turning halt and sway:  
We have seen Raynham slide  
A mile before the wind and slip and fall:  
We have seen spurred by all  
The wind's invisible and nervous side.  
And now away—  
The last jog homeward ends our holiday.  
Kick Polly's ribs and come. The hill-side way  
Gives us a slow and careful journey down.  
Come, now you see  
Far off the crowned lights of the distant town  
Beckon us home to stable and to tea.

Love loves the lucky, so they say,  
And I have had my luck to-day,  
Seeing you when I thought we had said good-  
bye.

To-morrow I am going away  
But this last luck new knots will tie  
In the handkerchief of your memory.

I do not trust you yet  
Not to forget,  
But better I should go and take my chance.  
It is thought that absence sometimes may enhance

The lover's gifts for whomso he may love,  
And that his image more may move  
Her mind than presence or than bold advance  
Of speech or touch. So think I not, but now  
To-morrow with an easier heart I go,  
Luck having blessed me,  
Though, on this hill's open and crowded brow,  
Only luck has kissed me.

We have seen Raynham slide  
A mile before the wind and slip and fall,  
And also, side by side,  
Maneyrolle and Gray,  
Against a darkening and a stormier day,  
Ride out the sudden squall.  
These men, in love with air, though who knows  
why,  
Trust luck to see them through the enterprise  
And in their risk discover ecstasy,  
Being better lucky than wise.  
As they on unknown currents fall and rise,  
So I on luck or on your favour,  
Both as unknown to science, as uncharted

As the wild air's behaviour,  
Will stake, glad-hearted,  
All that I am or may be, all that is I.

Love loves the lucky, so they say,  
And luck has been my friend to-day. . . .

## RESOLVE

SWEET, on your lips the seal is broken,  
The airy seal my lips set there,  
Another mouth has brushed the token  
Away into its parent air.

Once I reproached you with unkindness  
When I adored: you now I find,  
Awaking from my six months' blindness,  
Unkind to me but still too kind.

Shall I then damn you or forgive you,  
Whom I to faith can never charm?  
With proud or humble gesture leave you,  
Or kiss again and think no harm?

I have known love and thrice or more  
Has beauty on my pleading smiled,  
For one or two my heart was sore  
And one I loved was a fairy's child.

Fairies are neither good nor evil  
But strange: they follow different laws.  
Fool that I was in her to level  
Human effect and fairy cause!

With that deception sick and spent  
I wept alone but now I see  
She was, though wide her footsteps went,  
Faithful to love if not to me.

So are you not. Or have you known,  
Unknown to me, that grinding pain,  
The slow fire in the aching bone,  
The fierce worm in the sleepless brain?

All a long night I cried for you  
And in the morning I was healed:  
With the first lonely gleam I knew  
A peace assured though unrevealed.

Leave me my peace, and what you can  
Give me. I ask no more of you  
Than what you give to any man  
—And this, alas! I always knew——

Compliance equalling desire,  
The willing hands, the lips not grudged  
And the eyes' soft consenting fire  
—I judge not, let me not be judged!

Make we no more vows to be broken,  
Leave to its proper use the air!  
Sweet, on your lips I set no token  
But only seek the sweetness there.



## THE SNOW CLOUD

WE climb the well-remembered track,  
Lively our beasts, our spirits dull:  
Two-thirds the sky with cloud is black:  
With jerking shoulders the ponies pull.

The air is sharp, and high in air,  
Mountain, chasm and gully, stand  
The bleak dark snow clouds, and we stare  
Silent over the wintry land.

And over the empty hill we go  
Through waves and waves of lightless grass  
That dumbly wait the high-hung snow  
Or this bare shrivelling cold to pass.

Still neither speaks. O, we have changed.  
Our silence then was charged and deep,  
And hand in hand in thought we ranged  
Along the coomb and up the steep,

Where then in the heat the ponies slackly  
Trod the dry grass with heads hung low,  
Where now the cold cloud towering blackly  
Whips at their blood and makes them go—

Not ours! For our cold hearts are dumb

Nor answer each the other's call.

Can love again from these hearts come?

From that black cloud will white snow fall?

## THE BITTEN GRASS

How coldly I survey  
This windless corner in the bleached and wintry  
    gorse  
Which was our shelter once, day after day.  
But now my horse  
Is halted here by habit, not the rein,  
And here we stay,  
I dreaming coldly back, he reaching for the grass,  
In him no hunger and in me no pain,  
But in us both desires that idly pass.  
How sluggish is the beast, he will not move,  
How sluggish is my heart that has outgrown its  
    love!

So short a time, four seasons have not gone—  
This, if my heart forgets, my eye must know.  
Grass does not grow  
In autumn or in winter: till the sun  
Comes overhead again, there still shall be  
These white, dry, bitten stalks to testify  
That here long summer mornings we would lie  
While the ponies grazed beside us peaceably.  
These bitten stalks, a circle eaten dry  
And trampled down, this was our shelter, this  
Was where you drew me down, begging another  
    kiss.

## SPRING, MY SPRING

THIS year on spring's first day I came  
At ten o'clock to ride with you  
And while you saddled up I felt  
That strange sweet fire in the air again.

Dizzy I sat my quiet horse  
Who indolently stirred his hooves,  
Striking upon the bricks of the yard,  
Sharp sounds in that too honeyed air.

Through my brain the season fell,  
Wreathing like milk dripped into water:  
I sat motionless and drugged,  
Remembering a dozen springs.

Spring, my Spring, O ride with me,  
Thou unattainable, ghostly thing,  
And leaning from the saddle give me  
Your cool and ghostly, fleeting kiss.

## SONNET

THERE is something in us, not within our power,  
Released when our two spirits clash, as now  
We see the escaping sands of this swift hour  
Trickling towards our fate and wonder how  
This Genie from his hidden vessel came  
To shadow up our sky and hide away  
The love that burnt, a pure and constant flame,  
Between our hearts and minds but yesterday.  
Now like two children with a common fear  
We link cold hands and wait to see the end,  
Having neither will nor power to interfere,  
Knowing none on whom to call, or God or friend,  
Since our own selves have failed us and we stand  
Helpless till this strange power has shown its hand.

## SONNET

THE world has so much pain that who would add  
The last least pang to it? O dearest child,  
If from this silence I emerge not mad,  
Passion controlled and heart no longer wild,  
Shall I reproach you for having made of me  
Another man, who can feel this pain no more?  
Must you too suffer, because reluctantly  
You dragged the scab off the half-healing sore,  
And in that violence killed the nerve that feels  
The torments of unvalued love? I know  
That in this week may come the day that steals  
From youth his last response to joy or woe;  
And when I live again the I then dead  
Will bless from Limbo-shades your innocent head.

## THE SHADOWGRAPH

I PLAY a game that children play,  
Tracing your shadow on the wall;  
But on the wall the shadows stray,  
As the wood-flames flare and fall.

Your image lies there quiet now  
A moment. Quickly—I can draw  
The profile, chin, mouth, nose, and brow  
And close-coiled hair. But what I saw,

Ere half the line is traced, has gone:  
The pencil must begin anew,  
And all so eagerly begun  
But wastes the wall with scrawls untrue.

Until at last the lamp is brought,  
The game is done, and now I see  
The tangled scribble I have wrought  
Grimacing at me mockingly.

## SONG

THE sun dwells in the shoot,  
The bud, the flower, the fruit,  
And the ripe fruit may be won.  
We in our hands can hold  
The apple's glowing gold,  
We can possess the sun.

But, though one plead or weep,  
Yourself you safely keep  
From love's alarms and harms—  
A fleeting light-spot, thrown  
From a mirror by the sun,  
Which brightens but not warms.



## THE HAUNTING

THE owl that lives in a hole in the oak  
Need fear no more for your prying hand,  
That once on his daytime slumber broke  
In a game he never could understand.

You and I will go together no more  
And, setting our hands to the clock's loud  
chime,  
Strike four o'clock at twenty to four  
That the village may live by a fancied time.

The apples will hang on the drooping bough  
And you will not pluck at them as you pass:  
You never come down the pathway now  
Leading your pony out to grass.

You are gone from there and I could not stay  
In a place where ever I seemed to see  
A ghost that slipped through the winter day  
Too quickly to stop and speak to me.

For the ghosts of the living walk, I know,  
More often than those of the peaceful dead.  
Have I not through those alleys seen you go,  
A tall slim girl with a proud, small head?

If I walk, a ghost, in the garden yet,  
In the ghost of *our* garden let it be,  
With last year's rain may the lawns be wet,  
And spirits of leaves on a phantom tree.

Let the sap of the wounded sumach bleed  
Where we broke the boughs last year to pass,  
Let the poppy rattle her dried-up seed  
And last year's fir-cones lie on the grass.

This year I know not, I will not know  
If new flowers bloom for the voyaging bee,  
If here the bushes more thickly grow  
Or there a sapling is sprung to a tree.

There must be no change. If I found a change  
Then the phantom-I might find you there,  
Not a ghost, but the new year's you and strange,  
And the last year's you not anywhere.

## SONNET

*HE who so long a shadow contemplated*  
(The storm being done, a long-stilled voice hath  
said)

*Finds himself in the end with a shadow mated*  
*And, quick though it move, a shadow is but dead.*  
*We love not women but the images*  
*Ourselves have made of Beauty, Kindness, Youth:*  
*Vain shapes that any candle throws may please*  
*Till unexpected movement tells the truth.*

It was not you I loved, it was not you!  
It was your beauty was the flickering fire  
That, on the wall I watched so eagerly, threw  
A gibing shadow of my own desire.  
But, should I now to the real woman turn,  
Might true love of that first true sight be born?

## TO THE UNIMploRED BEloVED

REMAIn, for me, chaste, unapproached, unstirred,  
Never from me shall you hear any word

Asking that you should give me what I give.  
To-day I speak to you, but even to-day  
You shall not know it is you to whom I say,  
I love you and shall love you while I live.

Once in these years my lips have touched your lips:  
O will-benumbing sweetness!—so one sips

Timidly a magic, an immortal wine,  
Too strong for human bodies, only to try,  
Saying that if I die one can but die,  
But if I live that dangerous joy was mine.

Now move no footstep from your place, do not  
Repeat that moment, nor by any jot

Of speech, or touch of hand, or glance of eye  
Show to me any more than common kindness,  
But go your lovely way in lovely blindness,  
You the still seen, the enraptured seër I.

For gathered flowers go limp, bright-dusted wings  
Of handled butterflies grow shabby things,

The mistress once enjoyed becomes a woman  
—Attentive, kindly, comforting, too near,  
Till what was magic is no more than dear—  
So, knowing I am, I will not think you human.

376 TO THE UNIMploRED BEloVED

Some men love beauties they have found in books  
Or who from pictures with unfading looks

Gaze out upon this changing fading life.

I, you—and thus; and I would have you be  
Ever the same and still remote from me,

Only an image, neither lover nor wife.

## DARK HELEN

DARK Helen! phantom from my own blood  
steaming,

There never sleeping, absent never long,  
Thy ominous tresses on the night air streaming  
Still wake the old wars and that embroiling wrong!  
Still launchest thou the fleet of doomed desires  
And fliest on before them to destroy  
The fated walls of an eternal Troy,  
New risen in my heart from the old fires.  
The armies of longing muster at thy call  
And while camp-followers feast, the heroes fall,  
And the slow rivers are quickened with blood, and

again  
Achilles, Paris, Hector in me are slain—  
The brave, the beautiful, the faithful, all!

# THE BEGGAR'S RIDE

*To my Wife*

## CHARACTERS

The KING

LEO, Chancellor of the Kingdom

The TREASURER

The ARCHBISHOP

The PREFECT OF THE CITY

ANDREW, Leo's Clerk

AARON, a Merchant

DAVID, Aaron's Son

JACOB, a Beggar

A PEASANT

A SERVANT

HELENA, Leo's Daughter

NURSE

SOLDIERS, CITIZENS and BEGGARS

The scene is laid in and near the capital of a small Christian kingdom in Hither Asia. The time is a century or so before the capture of Constantinople by the Turks. The decoration and costumes must suggest chiefly the Byzantine, with a marked trace of the eastern and the barbaric. The action covers the period from early one morning until after midnight of the following day.



## FIRST SCENE

*The public square outside the Royal Palace. The gateway of the palace is on the left. Other buildings at the back and to the right. CITIZENS are crowding in, shouting confusedly as they run.*

A VOICE (*panting*): What is it? What are they running for?

SECOND VOICE: News!

VOICES: News! News from the front!

THIRD VOICE: A messenger from the army rode into the palace half an hour ago.

VOICES: What is the news? Tell us! What is it?

THIRD VOICE: My little boy saw him. His horse was almost foundering. He rode in great haste. His clothes were torn, and his face was covered with dust.

A VOICE: Bad news! Bad news! His wounds were dripping blood.

ANOTHER VOICE: The army is routed. The Turks are coming.

VOICES (*all shouting clamorously at the palace*): Come out and give us the news!—What has happened?—Come out!—All to your houses!—Where is the Chancellor? Where is the King?—The Chancellor! the Chancellor!—Leo! Leo! Leo!

A VOICE: Go to the walls. We must die upon the walls.

SECOND VOICE: It is good news!

VOICES: What?—What is he saying?

OTHER VOICES: What?—Shut him up!—Don't listen to him.—Silence, optimist!

*As the shouting grows louder and more confused, a group of men comes out of the palace. It consists of the KING, LEO, followed by DAVID and ANDREW, the ARCHBISHOP, the TREASURER, and the PREFECT. LEO advances a few steps and holds up his hand for silence. The crowd ceases, with a last despairing wail of "Tell us the news!"*

LEO: There is news from the Army. I am commanded by the King's Majesty to tell you that yesterday a great battle was fought. (*He pauses.*)

A VOICE (*ecstatically*): It is good news!

*There is laughter, some of it a little hysterical*

LEO: The battle began early in the morning, under the mountains. There were few of us and many of them. For an hour it went hard with our brave soldiers. Then the standards of Christ prevailed, and the Turks were routed and fled into the hills. All night our men pursued them, and to-day there is not one living Turk on the soil of our land. The city is delivered from its peril.

VOICES: Hurray!—Good news!—Good news!—Three cheers for Leo!—Three cheers for the King!—Hurray! Hurray!

A VOICE: Who brought the news? Let us cheer him.

A VOICE: Go to the walls. We must die upon the walls.

SECOND VOICE: It is good news!

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A VOICE: Who brought the news? Let us cheer him.

LEO *shakes his head. The crowd continues to cheer wildly*

LEO (*sharply to ANDREW*): What can we do to get them away? I will not have them shouting like this outside the palace all the morning. They will distract the King.

ANDREW: The Archbishop, my lord. . . .

ARCHBISHOP (*has overheard and comes forward, motioning for silence*): My children! My children, I say! In the transports of your joy, do not forget Who it is that has made you joyful. Is it by chance, do you think, that we, outposts as we are of God's Holy Church in this wild land, have withstood the heathen while all others have fallen before him? He came out of the east like the waves of the sea, like a flock of locusts, like the grains of a sand-storm in the desert whence he came. His hosts darkened the snows of our mountains, his camp-fires dimmed our stars at night. But God put His strength into the hearts of our soldiers, and they forgot themselves, and their fears, and all but the love of God and hatred of the unbeliever. Thus it was that we conquered, and therefore to God we give our thanks. To the Cathedral, all! To the Cathedral! The bells shall ring and the priests shall sing to-day!

*He goes forward and motions the crowd on, holding up his crozier. They begin to file out, shouting "To the Cathedral!" and singing*

I must go, my lord Chancellor. They will expect me to be there. Your Majesty. . . . (*He bows to the KING and begins to retire.*)

KING: Wait! (*The ARCHBISHOP pauses.*) It would be more fitting if I were to give thanks to God at the head of my people. Leo——

LEO: Your Majesty, this affair brings others behind it. It is of importance to the kingdom that they should be dealt with at once. I think (*speaking half to the ARCHBISHOP*) . . . a private service of thanksgiving in the Royal Chapel . . . later. . . .

*The ARCHBISHOP bows again to the KING and goes out*

KING: I will attend to this business at once. We must always remember, Leo, that the service of the kingdom is the true service of God.

LEO: I endeavour always to remember it, sir.

KING: Let a message be sent to my soldiers, telling them that I am much gratified by their success. They have deserved my confidence in them.

LEO (*having bowed*): Andrew, make a note of that.

*ANDREW bows and scribbles on a tablet*

Show me a draft this afternoon.

KING: And the messenger . . . yes, the messenger. (*He looks about vaguely.*) Where is he?

LEO (*smiling*): Here, sir. (*He draws DAVID nearer.*)

KING: Give him my thanks and ten gold pieces. Tell him that he shall be excused from active service and made a sergeant in my own bodyguard. And he may kiss my hand, and tell his comrades about it when they are all in barracks again.

LEO: Do you not know him, sir?

KING: Know him? Why should I know him?

LEO: He has kissed your hand before, sir. His clothes are torn, and his face is covered with sweat and dust and blood. And he is a little drawn with fatigue. But he is the son of your very faithful and useful subject, Aaron the merchant. His name is David.

KING: An officer. Aaron's son—David. Of course, I remember. (*Graciously*) I congratulate you, David. No one could have been more agreeable to me as a bearer of good news from the front. Were you in the fighting? (*He does not wait for an answer.*) And do you mean to follow your father in his honourable career?

LEO: He is almost *my* son, sir, and in this all mine. Aaron is my oldest and truest friend, and he has given me his son—because I have no children, but only one daughter. I have long watched this boy, hoping that he might grow up to serve you as I have done. Now I am beginning to expect much of him.

KING: That is very good. He may stay with us and listen to our business. What is it?

LEO: This, sir. The army has won a great victory against heavy odds. The soldiers, like the citizens, are beside themselves with joy. But no more than a week ago, they were far from joyful, so far that they murmured on parade. I had a report on the spirit of the troops which alarmed me. The men, loyal fellows as they are, were beginning to be restless, to grumble indeed—

KING (*offended*): To grumble?

LEO: Because they had received no pay, sir. For the moment, that is over. No man who has charged

over the enemy's lines, and seen the enemy run before him, and is still glad to find himself alive, stops to remember yesterday's grievance. But the glow of a victorious day soon fades out of the minds of the victors. The discontent will return, and then it will be bitterer than ever. We must make a distribution of pay. I have discussed it with the Treasurer and heard his arguments against it.

TREASURER: I make no comment on the spirit of the army, Chancellor. The reports come to you, not to me. But you know my views. The Treasury is not a widow's cruze. Far from it. We are severely hampered . . . the salt-tax is coming in very badly. . . .

KING: There, my Leo—you yourself have put the matter very well. We can wait until the discontent is renewed. This lucky battle will help us to keep a little longer the few coins we still have in hand. And it would be a pity if the greatest triumph of my reign were not to be celebrated by an arch, say, or perhaps a column.

LEO: Speak, David. Tell his Majesty what you told me.

DAVID (*with diffidence, but not self-consciously*): Your Majesty, may I speak?

KING (*with condescension*): Yes, my boy. Speak, by all means. Let us see your statesmanship.

DAVID (*with more eagerness*): Your Majesty, I am fresh from the army and I believe that I know a little of what the men are thinking. If I were a common soldier, in need of my pay, before long the want of it, perhaps even against my will, would make me discontented.

TREASURER: With all respect to you, Chancellor, and to your more or less adopted son, I think that these accounts of the spirit of the troops are always very highly coloured. You do not suggest mutiny, young man?

DAVID (*still addressing the KING*): I beg, sir, that you will not misunderstand me. The army is loyal. It does not grumble even at its officers, far less against the King. But—it . . . grumbles.

TREASURER: Precisely; that is my point. I was a soldier myself when I was a young man. Soldiers always do grumble.

DAVID: But, sir, which would be the better course? To distribute arrears of pay to discontented men who have long demanded it? Or to give it freely as a reward to men exulting in their victory? If they are paid now, the soldiers will overflow with love and praise of their King.

KING: Leo, the boy speaks with intelligence. I hope you will be able to make some use of him.

TREASURER: The boy speaks with eloquence, at least. The fire of youth and the wisdom of—

LEO: I agree with you, sir, that a distribution should be made to the army at once.

KING: You express my decision correctly. And yet . . . a triumphal arch . . . with carvings—the Turks in flight, and St. Michael, who is my patron, smiting them. . . .

LEO (*to the TREASURER*): My lord, his Majesty will visit the Treasury to-day to perform the necessary ceremonial. I shall be in attendance. Will you go before us, to make preparation? My clerk will follow you and give you the papers. Andrew!



*The TREASURER lifts his hands as if in protest, thinks better of it, bows low to the KING, and goes out, followed by ANDREW*

LEO (*to the PREFECT*): You will see to the clearing of the streets.

PREFECT: I will, my lord.

*He bows and goes out*

LEO: There is one thing more, sir.

KING: Speak, Leo.

LEO: To-day this young man has been twice so happy as to be of trifling service to your Majesty. May he ask, in overwhelming return, a blessing on his approaching marriage?

KING: Your marriage, my boy? I am very glad to hear of it. Let the son of my servant Aaron marry and beget more faithful servants for me. Ah, Leo, Leo, if but the faithful alone were fruitful, and the traitorous always barren!

LEO: There are no traitors in your kingdom, sir.

KING: A king must always be on his guard against traitors; it is his duty to his subjects as well as to himself. Why, Leo, if even you were ever to raise a doubt in my mind—— But that you have never done, Leo! Never, never! For thirty years you have carried out all my orders faithfully and helped me in the heavy task of government. Ah, what years, what labours have I devoted to my country! And now this young man whom you recommend to me is to be married. He is grown up, and he will take a wife. What bride has your father chosen for you? Or has your—your almost father made the choice?

DAVID: They have chosen together, sir. My bride is Helena, the only daughter of my lord Leo, who is my second father.

KING: They have chosen very well between them. Nothing could be more suitable. They knew in advance that I should approve. No, David, I shall not give you my blessing to-day. You may ask me for it again—at your wedding, where you are to expect me as a guest.

LEO: We are deeply grateful for your Majesty's condescension.

DAVID: Your Majesty honours me.

KING: I will go and think over this matter of a triumphal arch.

LEO: It shall be considered, sir. I will consult with the Palace Architect.

*He and DAVID bow to the KING, who goes into the Palace with a slight gesture of dismissal. They both stand staring after him for a moment*

DAVID (*ironically*): And you have chosen me as your successor, my second father?

LEO: It is my hope. Why not?

DAVID (*pointing after the KING*): That?

LEO (*laying a hand on his shoulder and speaking fondly*): That! You foolish boy! What is that? Have you given up riding because your horse, like all horses, is unaccountable and stupid?

DAVID: But you are forced to obey such a man—a man whom you can treat with so much calmness of contempt that he does not even know himself despised.

LEO: As you grow older, David, you will not the

less despise a fool, but you will cease to let his folly ruffle your mind. That is one of the many things you will learn. But I do not want you to learn too soon, and that is why I am going to send you away now. If you followed me and saw all the papers I must sign this morning, the sight would dismay you even more than our wise and gracious King. The bearer of good news must have a holiday. What will you do with it?

DAVID (*hesitatingly*): I should like . . . to visit Helena.

LEO: No! It would not be proper. It is out of the question.

DAVID: But, my father, we played together every day when we were children. I think I loved her even then.

LEO: You played together as children, David? How long ago was that?

DAVID: I have not seen her for nine years.

LEO: Not since she was ten and you twelve. Nine years! And you are to be married next week.

DAVID: She will come to me veiled, you leading her, her bridesmaids about her. Perhaps she will be afraid of me. She must have forgotten. I want to see her before——

LEO: You want to see whether your playmate of nine years ago——

DAVID (*eagerly*): Yes!

LEO: Is a fit bride for you?

DAVID: No, no, no! If she is still my friend, if she still loves me. I remember days, in those days, when I was selfish and unkind, when I hated her and she hid from me. We were children then. . . .

LEO: David, I forbid it. Nine years ago we separated you, when it was no longer right that you should be playmates together. Helena cried then, many days, but you had your games with the other boys. Now—there is one week more, and you will be husband and wife.

DAVID: What does it matter, then? You say she cried. . . .?

LEO: We are not peasants. We, more than all the rest, must do what is decent and fitting. And you, David, must be spotless in the sight of this our world. So much lies before you, my son, that is yours to do whether you like it or not. You will have your father's great wealth to help you—and more, for you will have my favour—and more, for you will have yourself, and I should not so choose you if I thought lightly of you. It is not a trifling thing, David, to rule even this kingdom. We are alone here, we, the little hill-people, with our city and our church and our faith, all alone among the infidel. I have not found it easy work, and you will not find it easy—but it is work well worth the doing. Now, dear David, you must go. I have talked to you too long and too seriously. Go away, my boy, and enjoy your holiday.

DAVID (*a little rebelliously*): I promise you I will do my best to enjoy my holiday.

*He turns away. LEO smiles after him with benevolent wisdom as*

*The Curtain falls*

## SECOND SCENE

*A street in the city. A BEGGAR is huddled on a doorstep, with his begging-bowl in front of him. CITIZENS pass over, talking. Some of them look at him, frown, shake their heads, and go on.*

BEGGAR (*in a sing-song voice*): Give 'me a penny  
for the love of God!

Give me a penny, give a poor old man  
A penny, for the love of God a penny,  
And I will make your names ring in my prayers  
Till Heaven must hear me.

*The last CITIZEN passes out*

Curse their puffy flesh!  
May God bring ills upon them, snatch their  
money,  
Throw down their houses, make their wives un-  
faithful,  
Give them for sons and daughters thieves and  
bitches,  
Utterly ruin them!

Here I sit all day,  
A wasted man, aching and marked with sores,  
Hungry and thirsty always, and parched or  
shivering,  
Covered with dust, bitten by creeping vermin,

Hated by all, and thrust aside and spurned  
By the rich passers-by whose silken robes  
Sound vainly in my ear and sting my brain  
With soft remembrances of better hours.  
Would that I were what I have been, or else  
That I had never been! God's anger on me  
Falls, not a blow but a long enmity,  
Untiring day by day and year by year:  
And still with penny doles He keeps me alive  
Till the full sum of His cold hate be added.  
Would that I were what I have been! Ah, then,  
In youth I was gay, glad and free. My brother  
Followed me, aping me, a loving shadow,  
Who came to me, cringing with piteous words,  
For help when courage had been used so far  
That not enough remained to fill the adventure.  
Where is he now? Aaron, where are you now?  
Lying perhaps upon the rich divan  
In his own palace, in the fountain-court,  
Hid from this dust and heat. His slaves attend him.  
One brings him drink, another, maybe, announces  
A noble of the land, a shrinking debtor,  
Who comes to beg a respite of a week  
Ere ruin strike him. And Aaron, drowsily,  
Forbids his entrance, and exclaims: Tell him  
The debt of a thousand florins is forgiven,  
Or else: The debt must be discharged to-day,  
What otherwise befalls he knows, so tell him.  
Aaron, Aaron, Aaron! That last time  
You gave me help, I saw our youth was dead,  
Saw it in the wrinkles round your solemn lips,  
The set of your fat eye-lids. And when again  
I came to your door, stooping in shame and fear,

Your steward stopped me there and gave me,  
grinning,  
Your parting gift, a beggar's bowl, for alms!  
This chipped and shabby bowl that lies here empty!  
O Aaron! Aaron!

When we were young and fit for life at large  
You followed where I led, and from my purse  
Your hand was never absent. Have I not  
Writ letters in your name to ladies, bribed  
Porters for you, and soothed the company  
When with your awkwardness you had enraged it,  
Saved you from cheats and bullies and from  
husbands,

And on mine own head taken our father's curse  
For all our rambling deeds? And now you prosper,  
Fattened on bargaining and cent. per cent.,  
And here I sit, or in some corner sleep,  
Or on the dung-soiled straw in any stable,  
Where the grooms give me shelter for the night,  
To treat me as their butt and thing of scorn,  
Which pays the lodging. And daily in my breast  
This hurt eats on apace, as outwardly  
The sores dissolve my wholesome flesh, and  
cankers

Invisibly my heart. O, this resentment  
Feeds upon hope and kindness and love of virtue  
And gnaws the goodness of the natural man,  
Leaving instead a rotten mess of evil,  
An envious ulcer that grows and grows and grows,  
Till I, who once was joy, am hatred now!

*Two CITIZENS enter*

Give me a penny, give a poor old man

A penny, for the love of God a penny,  
And I will make your names ring in my prayers—

FIRST CITIZEN: O, well! a penny isn't much to ask for.

SECOND CITIZEN: Go on, then. Give him a penny, and shame me into giving him one as well. Then, when your wife says you are soft-hearted, or some one in the market who is trying to flatter you, you can blush and look awkward, and deny it, and feel pleased with yourself. That's cheap at a penny surely! (*He throws a coin ringingly into the bowl.*)

BEGGAR (*with unctuous humility*): God bless you, sir. Often a kind heart speaks with a rough tongue.

FIRST CITIZEN (*ostentatiously laying a silver coin in the bowl*): There, old man. I shall depend on you for your prayers.

BEGGAR: May God bless you indeed, sir. You have given me food and lodging for a week. O, what a happy man I am to-day! The relief . . . and the kindness. . . . (*He weeps.*)

FIRST CITIZEN: Things like this are horrible to me. They make me hate my house and my meals.

SECOND CITIZEN: Is it necessary? Your wife cooks abominably. I dare say, if we only knew, this old gentleman has a charming house in the suburbs, and a domestic staff beyond reproach.

BEGGAR: O, sir, I was not always like this. I was once rich. I had once a house in the suburbs and servants who, if not above reproach, looked after me well enough. And now—

FIRST CITIZEN: Poor old man! Take this other florin, and spend it on a luxury, and pray again for me.



BEGGAR: O, sir——!

SECOND CITIZEN: How came you to be so reduced?

BEGGAR: My own folly, and the ingratitude of friends.

SECOND CITIZEN: You were very rich?

BEGGAR: My father was rich. And to-day my brother is rich, he whom I led by the hand, until he turned on me. He is the richest of all the merchants in this accursèd city, but me he hates——

SECOND CITIZEN: You must be much older than you look.

BEGGAR: Why, sir? If I can believe the puddles I see my face in, I fear I look older than I am.

SECOND CITIZEN: Because when I was only four years old, when I was walking with my father, he gave a penny to a beggar—we have always been a frugal family—and heard from him just the same story that you have told. I think you must be the man.

FIRST CITIZEN: Don't laugh at him!

SECOND CITIZEN (*with a shrug*): Your money is your own.

BEGGAR (*watching them with innocent and pitiable anxiety*): I have had great misfortunes.

FIRST CITIZEN: I am sure you have. And what an end to them! To sit here, day after day, imploring the hard-hearted for their charity. And hard-hearted they are! Our three coins lie alone in your bowl. Is that all you have taken to-day?

BEGGAR: Alas, sir, it is all I have taken in three days.

FIRST CITIZEN: You have starved for three days?

BEGGAR: Starved, sir.

FIRST CITIZEN: Horrible! But I will help you.

Come to my house to-night, near the Western Gate, and you shall have food and some old clothes and dry straw in an outhouse. My name is Michael.

SECOND CITIZEN: My dear Michael, do you keep fowls? If so, you might save yourself disillusionment by offering them to him now.

BEGGAR (*humbly*): The gentleman will have his joke.

*A SOLDIER comes in, carrying a spear*

SOLDIER (*to the BEGGAR*): Get on out of it, you swine. Clear out of this.

FIRST CITIZEN: How dare you speak to him like that? Why should you bully him? *I am speaking to him.*

SOLDIER (*politely*): Let me warn you, sir, not to hinder me in the execution of my duty. But, if you must know, the King will shortly pass by on his way to the Treasury to make a distribution of pay to the army—and high time too. Get on, dog.

*He prods the BEGGAR with the butt of his spear*

FIRST CITIZEN: No, you shall not——

SECOND CITIZEN: Don't be a fool.

SOLDIER (*carelessly*): I expect he's been taking you in with a wonderful story about his troubles. Come on, old rat. (*He prods the BEGGAR again.*)

FIRST CITIZEN: This is a most deserving case. I intend to relieve it——

*The SOLDIER prods the BEGGAR again and harder, so that he rises to his feet with a cry of pain. As he does so, coins fall out of his clothes and roll in every direction. He sprawls on the ground, trying to collect them.*

FIRST CITIZEN (*angrily*): Did you lie to me, you beast? (*He raises his stick to strike the BEGGAR.*)

SOLDIER (*interposing his spear*): Better leave that to me, sir, if you don't mind. Come on, you old villain, pick them up and be off with you.

BEGGAR (*crouching in bestial attitudes to collect the coins, still prodded by the SOLDIER*): They are not so many . . . after all. . . . (*He crawls past the SOLDIER and runs out.*)

SOLDIER: Hi! No, not that way! You're going towards the King: O, well, he's off my beat, anyway.

FIRST CITIZEN: Such cheats ought to be driven out of the city altogether.

SECOND CITIZEN: If I were you, I should say nothing about it.

SOLDIER: Ah, I'll lay you're not the first gentleman he's taken in. Good morning, gentlemen.

*He goes out*

SECOND CITIZEN: If the King is going to pass this way, we might as well stay here to see him go.

FIRST CITIZEN: Yes, it will be a good place. To the Treasury, the soldier said.

SECOND CITIZEN: Yes. And he said—And high time too.

FIRST CITIZEN: What do you mean by that?

SECOND CITIZEN: Only that I agree with the soldier.

FIRST CITIZEN: It is very right to distribute pay on the morrow of a victory. We must always remember our brave fighting men and——

*Other CITIZENS have been gathering on the stage,  
and now one of them joins in the argument*

THIRD CITIZEN: My son is one of our brave fighting men, and he's longing to be remembered. Says he hasn't been able to buy himself a drink for a month. (*Laughter.*) I wonder what they'll give him now—about a quarter of what they owe him, most likely.

FOURTH CITIZEN: Ah, that's as may be.

FIRST CITIZEN: But we are very poor, the Treasury is almost empty, the taxes are heavier than we can bear——

FOURTH CITIZEN: Ah, that's as may be. (*Laughter.*)

THIRD CITIZEN: The troops are the people. And Leo is the friend of the people.

FIRST CITIZEN: What do you mean? Who are you?

THIRD CITIZEN: Perhaps you don't know me. But you need not be afraid of me, even if I do dare to say what I think.

SECOND CITIZEN: What do you think? It may be that we think alike.

THIRD CITIZEN: That we are an unhappy people, and that Leo is as good a friend to us as he is allowed to be.

VOICES: What's that?—What is he saying?—Leo!—He's talking dangerously!

FIRST CITIZEN: What do you say? Are you a traitor?

THIRD CITIZEN: Never mind what I say. An honest man can speak his mind freely, I hope.

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*There is a confused murmur of voices in which the FIRST and SECOND CITIZENS come together again*

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*There is a confused murmur of voices in which the FIRST and SECOND CITIZENS come together again*

The fall has jarred you so, you are distracted,  
Yet I believe no mischief has been done.  
Who said a doctor dwelt here? Fetch him quickly.  
Our master needs him.

KING: Did you say a doctor?  
What do you mean by that? O, Leo, Leo,  
Spare me that I may go to end my days,  
A monk in some cold mountain monastery,  
Harmless and unmolested. If, when I reigned,  
I ever did offend you, now forget it;  
This is your turn.

LEO (*urgently*): I beg you, sir, be quiet.  
You are overheard.

KING: Where am I? Where are we?  
Do you mock me, Leo? I thought. . . . 'I am  
astray. . . .

*He stares about him in a confused manner*  
I fell and I was stunned, I am better. Tell me,  
What threw me down?  
LEO: My lord, this wretched beggar,  
Who here awaits his proper punishment,  
Ran crouching from the gutter, as we passed,  
Towards you, with some ill thought, as I guess,  
Either perhaps to stab you or to throw  
By touching you a ghastly charm on you.  
But as he ran so foul a sight amazed  
My horse, which shied and reared and fell on yours  
And threw you from the saddle.

KING: As I thought—  
The girths were much too loose.

LEO: O Lord, forgive  
The unwitting harm which your poor servant did.

KING: What, am I safe then? Was there no  
attempt? . . .

LEO: None, sir, save what this man did rashly  
make,



And that is over and miscarried.

KING: Rashly? . . .

The word is strange.

LEO: Because the man is mad,  
With wicked madness.

KING: Do not be so hasty;  
Slowly, until I get my breath again.  
And was there nothing else? Tell me, have you  
Seen him before? Swear to me, Leo.

LEO: I swear  
I know him not, neither shall any man  
Know him again. Judgment is passed on him.  
BEGGAR (*screaming*): O Sword of Christ in Asia,  
let me speak.

LEO: Silence, abhorred and wicked carrion!

BEGGAR (*with dignity*): I speak to the King.

KING (*suddenly*): And I will hear him speak.  
Shall not the meanest of my folk be heard  
Before I order him to death?

BEGGAR: Oh, kindness!

Oh, goodness clothèd in a royal robe!  
In whose hands life and death reside, conjoined  
With the scrolls of law. . . . I know not how to say  
What I must say, your presence dazzles me.

KING: Speak on, my servant, speak, and have no  
fear:

In life, or past it, we are both God's children.

BEGGAR: I am an old, infirm and wretched man,  
Having nothing left in life but a few years  
Empty of joy and full of slow, dark pain.  
Therefore I set these years upon the cast  
To touch your sacred hand and so be healed  
Or to exchange my long-drawn agony

For a brief pang, under your royal sword.  
 My master, and my King, whom I adore,  
 Find it not crime in me that this man's horse,  
 Huge and unseemly managed, bore you down.  
 But if I die, grant me this boon at least,  
 To slay me now with your own kingly hand,  
 The second best that you can give to me,  
 Yet if you would, you still can make me whole.  
 But I will die. Yet, Master, as you strike,  
 Ponder what I shall say. . . .

KING: What?

BEGGAR: In the hour of death,  
 God gives me light. Now learn I why He has  
 Kept me so long in pain and misery,  
 Why starved me, why tormented me with boils,  
 Why driven me to-day to such an act .  
 As brings me near my end. I was reserved,  
 And purified by pain, and moved by madness  
 That thus in my last hour to His Anointed  
 I might His Word deliver. Strike, O King,  
 But after striking bear God's word in mind—  
 What the horse did the rider yet may do!

LEO: He is impertinent.

KING: The word is dangerous.

LEO: But spare him if you will. He is a madman,  
 Whom we can see to. I will have him watched.  
 Andrew—

ANDREW *comes forward*

KING: Clerk, the King's will is in *my* mouth.  
 (To LEO) Will not your watchers put him in a  
 place  
 Where they can save their labour?

LEO: Sir, you jest.

Do anything with him, but mount again.  
 I see the fall has hardly shaken you,  
 And time goes on, the sun is growing hot,  
 And business waits us. Come, to horse, my lord!

KING: God's voice may issue from a beggar's  
 mouth,  
 And this man's eyes and voice have something  
 strange,

As though his sufferings had lit a fire  
 Deep in the heart, for God's own purposes.  
 Leo, how did it come that you, who are  
 So tried a horseman, with a wrist of iron,  
 Knew not the management of that great beast,  
 Seeing that it has carried you so long?

LEO: My lord, you mock me, and unkindly, to  
 play  
 Thus with the foul words of a maniac,  
 Too dark and wild for any answer here,  
 So many common folk being gathered round  
 That hear us talking. Mount, my lord, and on.  
 KING: Leo, I much mistrust you.

*LEO starts angrily*

Do you doubt it?  
 LEO: It is a word not easy to believe  
 In the mouth of him who was so long my friend.  
 KING: Yet doubts must be resolved where truth  
 is blazoned.

What, man, do you look proudly at me, think  
 That when you have me once again in private  
 You'll scold me and chastise me for my rudeness?  
 I am your King!

LEO: Sir, this to an old friend——

KING: No friend to me, a too-long pampered  
servant!

Dare not to answer! Silence, silence, silence!

I am the King! *A long pause*

I strip your honours off,  
You are no more Chancellor! Lay down your office,  
Dishonourable man, whom I have loved  
So many years so much to mine own peril.  
This is the end. Leo, I loved you then  
When you did seem a meek, obedient servant,  
The Kingdom's shield, as I the Kingdom's sword.  
I am ashamed to have imperilled thus  
My sacred heritage. Give me your seals  
And leave me, lest my anger master me.

LEO: You are distraught, my lord, you wander  
still,

You wits are shaken——

KING: This I will not bear!

O God, from Whom I have my sovereignty,  
Put out Thy hand and take me by the wrist  
Lest by my stroke these gray good-seeming hairs  
Be smeared with his own blood. I swear to you,  
Leo, I swear it by my father's tomb,  
Go from me quickly—this I shall not bear—  
Go, go, go, go!

LEO: Now most of all I stay,

For now most basely should I play the traitor,  
Did I desert you in this nightmare fit.  
Master, my duty conquers any fear  
And this poor life, which gladly I would risk  
Against ill-wishers, must I not expose  
Even to your own wrath when you need it so?

KING: How subtly and how smoothly do you speak!

This was your power, this, not nobility.

LEO: Let me but use my power, whate'er it be,  
To serve you.

KING: Nay, mine eyes are open now.  
Leo, you much mistake me. Never more  
Have I been sane and governing in my reason,  
But you provoke me.

LEO: I too am provoked,  
But we will speak of this another time.

KING: I have spoken once.

LEO: But words so lightly spoken  
Fly off like feathers. Lord, what will you do?  
How will you rule the crank, uneasy realm  
Which I have borne so long with pain and toil?  
The army murmurs, and its victory  
May be to-morrow vain, the infidel  
Come crowding in again across our frontiers.  
Where is another man to fill my place,  
To serve you and to shield you as I have done?

KING: There speaks the tyrant, thus you have  
unveiled

Your villainy in full. Man, I can make  
A Chancellor from the mud upon my shoes!  
Listen to me, proud man, watch what I do—  
This poor despised beggar, this mere sore,  
The semblance of a man, shall fill your place  
And fill it nobly since I so ordain.  
You, guards, release our Chancellor and hail him.  
Rise, man, and let me kiss you. There—and there—  
You are installed, you are my minister,  
Confirmed with absolute power in my name.

BEGGAR (*standing upright, his arms above his head*):  
O Lord, O Splendour, Scales and Sword in one,  
Shall thus the humble be exalted, thus  
Shall divine justice be dispensed on earth  
Before the judgment day?

KING: Arise and rule,  
As I command you. Speak now, Leo, speak.  
Has not your cunning any word for this?  
What do you say?

LEO: Lord, I am broken and dumb—  
O Lord, bethink you, for the times are heavy.  
Your ancient throne, though you will see it not,  
Trembles beneath you and the infidels  
Still range in power against our sacred sword.

KING: Your words are treasonous!

LEO: O my lord, my lord,  
I speak in duty. Break me, if it must be,  
When I have done my task, not yet . . . not now. . . .  
A little time . . . not now. . . .

BEGGAR (*with wide, staring eyes, as if in a trance*):  
I am exalted!

KING: How like a taken felon he sobs and  
stammers,  
As thin a husk of man as this has been,  
Who now swells out, portly, authoritative,  
Filled with the breath and fire of royal favour.  
Chancellor, tell me your name.

BEGGAR: 'Tis long forgot—  
Once it was Jacob.

KING: Jacob, take the seals:  
Rule as I bid you.

LEO: But the people, lord—

KING: My people, I, your master, order you

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To cheer for Jacob.

A FEW VOICES: Jacob! Long live Jacob!

A VOICE: Shame on this wickedness!

MANY VOICES: Down, tear him down!  
Jacob's our master, Jacob! Jacob lives!

KING: Now take the seals.

BEGGAR: Fellow, give me the seals.

KING: You, clerk—I cannot keep your name in  
mind—

This is your business.

ANDREW: If you bid me, sir—

(To LEO): My lord, I must obey our lord. The  
seals. . . .

LEO: I will obey.

ANDREW *takes the seals from his fingers and  
gives them to JACOB*

KING: This warning comes too late,  
My Leo, to avail you, but you learn  
Thus at the last how kings make ministers  
Powerful and well-beloved, and can unmake  
them.

Thus I unmake you, as I'd throw away  
A sword with faulty hilt that seemed to threaten  
More hurt than help. Jacob, you shall be housed  
As best befits your office. See to it.  
I will ride home again. We will consider  
Anew the rash intent that would lay bare  
My treasury of gold.

LEO: Give back the seals!  
This kills us all!

KING: Silence! Your first command  
Shall be to our own guards to take this man

And whip him like a thief. Then follow me.

*He goes out*

BEGGAR (*hoarsely*): Seize him!

LEO: Beware! you know me, all of you.

BEGGAR: Seize him—he has not drawn his sword.

*Two of the GUARDS put their hands on LEO's shoulders*

LEO: Just God!

Make Thou me calm, give me a careful mind!

BEGGAR: Are you in fear of me? Do you pray to God?

But God hath shown His mercy on my side  
And struck the proud man from his seat. Then  
cringe

Before this lifted hand that God impels.  
You fear me not? Why, you have eyes, although  
You set your mouth so firmly, square your  
shoulders,

And through your eyes I see your anxious soul  
Shaken and trembling—and I see your fingers  
Cramping and clutching as the iron dread  
Invades your body. But be comforted,  
I have not spoken death.

LEO: Of dignity

I will not speak to you, but of respect

I may speak, for you know your master, slave.

BEGGAR: Foul beast, and fallen beast, and captive  
beast,

I, if I would, might strike you in the mouth,  
Defile your combed beard, might maul your face



### THIRD SCENE

*The women's quarters in LEO's house.*

HELENA and her NURSE.

NURSE: His lips are red, his nose narrow, his  
eyes

Lively with many lights, his eyebrows arched. . . .

HELENA: Speak on, speak on! I listen with my  
heart,

Where all the wild blood lingers for the tale.

NURSE: Ah, happy maid, to wed in such a house,  
Old and securely built on certain wealth  
And praised in all the city. Never yet  
Since Christ came down on earth has any merchant  
Risen to so much wealth or grown so great  
As Aaron. Never yet has any man  
Promised his son so rich a heritage,  
So many jewels, houses, lands, and slaves,  
And with all these so honourable a name,  
As David shall possess.

HELENA: God send my pillow,  
Wedded or maiden, other dreams than these!  
Were it not shame in me if I should reckon  
The wealth of David side by side with love?

NURSE: Love is a perishable stuff, and wealth  
Endures above the changes of the world.  
Hearken, my dear, David may rest a day

On your heart's bough for love, but in his house  
You must live all your life. And Aaron's house  
Covers, the gossip says, a hundred acres  
Of gardens, with pavilions, and heavy orchards  
Of quince and peach and mulberry and pear.  
There in those pleasancess are little bowers,  
Encircled by tall shaven walls of box,  
And curiously adorned  
With bushes trimmed in all fantastic shapes,  
Where slender fountains waver in the wind,  
Hardly descried against the burning air.  
And they have chosen slaves, Ethiops and dwarfs  
From the burnt South, and supple Syrians,  
And the submissive Indians, and the white  
Upstanding savages with yellow hair,  
And these attend in honour continually  
Their masters and their mistresses, and bring,  
When they shall call for it, the rarest wine,  
Cool in the long, slim cups of amethyst. . . .  
It is a dream, their life is such a life  
As I can enter only in a dream.

HELENA: You have not dreamt my dreams.

NURSE: You dream amiss—

These are the pillars of a goodly life,  
So you will learn.

HELENA: I would not muse upon  
The huge and dusty bales that wait the moth  
In Aaron's warehouse, or the trivial joys  
Of gardens, or of cool and foaming wine.  
Tell me again of David. You have sullied  
The clear reflective waters of my mind.  
With all this talk of palaces and slaves.  
My soul inclines to David. Is he not

My love and my betrothed? And was he not  
For years my first companion?

NURSE:

David, David . . .

Not twice in this life have I seen a youth  
Gallant as he. He cantered through the city  
On a tall Arab, and his soldier's sabre  
That swung and glittered lightly at his belt  
Vied with the blazing ruby at his throat.  
He shone with light, his horse, caparisoned  
In gorgeous gold, moved like a glowing beast,  
And they two seemed to draw the sun with them  
Along the street and leave a shade behind.

HELENA: You cheat me still. I have a casket of  
stones,

Strung or unstrung, or set in silver or gold,  
Which I can spread to take the light and please  
me

With many colours. What are these to me?  
I ask of David, ask you of my love,  
Whom I would follow were he clad in rags  
To share the gross meat in his begging-bowl.  
Tell me of him.

NURSE:

I have a hundred times  
Described him to you, said that he is tall,  
Broad in the shoulders, with a mighty arm,  
Yet with a lovely, with an angel's face,  
A warrior-angel's, with soft eyes of love,  
The curving mouth of pride, and power's wide  
nostrils,

And the clear, quickly flushing skin that speaks  
Of an unconquerable heart.

HELENA:

Has he . . .

Speak truth, has any heard him speak of me?

NURSE: He said: By God, I pledge my hand and sword

That never will I touch the cup again  
Until my bride upon our bridal day  
Hands me her own. I shall not know my loss,  
Having so much a greater loss than this  
Till I am wed with her.

HELENA: O David! David!  
Why is the day so long?

NURSE: He said: My life  
Plods onward, as a lame and stumbling horse  
The last and weariest league towards the well,  
But in that well (he said) I know resides  
The vital wave that is my joy, my hope.

HELENA: David, my bowels melt, mine eyes are  
dazzled.

Why is the day so long? Why do our fathers  
Set up this intermission from the promise  
To the fulfilment? We are like one who feasts  
Emptily on the names of costly dishes  
Which feed him not but stab him keenlier  
With hunger.

NURSE: Then he said: The maid  
Is swift and gracious as a hill-side deer  
And ardent as the bird that fills the noon  
With love's sweet murmurs. Ah, my dear, my  
dove,  
(He cried, and claspt his hands), why is the day  
Set so far off?

HELENA: Alas, David, my own!  
Did you not say his mouth was arched with pride?

NURSE: Yes, taut and firm as a good archer's  
bow.

HELENA: Did you not say his eyes were full of light?

NURSE: Brighter for her he loves than is the sun.

HELENA: Is not his body strong? Is he not tall?

NURSE: Strong as a lion, as a cedar tall,  
Driven by a great and high-designing heart,  
That feeds on pride and the dear thoughts of love.

HELENA: My nurse, these eighteen years you  
have cherished me.

I am your nursling, fed first at your breast,  
Afterwards tended by your hands, and taught  
By your wise mouth. Say, am I meet for him?  
Tell me, tell me the truth. Will he discover,  
When he beholds me, when he lifts my veil,  
What he desires? Tell me, I am afraid.

NURSE: Be comforted, dear child, dear fosterling,  
When you are his, he shall be amazed to find  
So much more than he dreamt.

HELENA: Then am I fair?

NURSE: A flower, a pearl, a bird of paradise.

HELENA: Would that the day were here.

*A pause*

HELENA: But—this one thing . . .  
Will he behold in me what he remembers,  
If he remembers, as I do, those days  
When we were children? Nurse, he loved me then,  
Or now I think he did, for memory here,  
In woman's life, plays always upon nothings,  
Pares them away and adds to them until  
Nought's what it was but all as now we'd have it.  
Men in their lives discard such trifles lightly.

NURSE: To-day I gave him an old toy of yours



And when he had it in his hand his eyes  
Grew softer, brighter, and the tears were ready. . . .

HELENA: Would that the day were here !

NURSE: Perhaps that day  
May throw a light before it and gild this hour  
As on the hill-tops you may see the sun  
Long ere he rises up to warm the world  
For waking and for work.

HELENA: You show a secret.  
What do you mean?

NURSE: Your husband yearns for you,  
As you for him, and being a man and free,  
And a brave youth, rich both in gold and cunning—  
Enough, no more, no more, but wait what comes.

HELENA: You move my blood to strange and  
hidden thoughts.  
Speak to me plainly.

NURSE: Soon enough for you  
My meaning shall be plain. Ah, fosterling,  
God grant I am not careless of your honour  
Who love you all too much.

HELENA: What do you mean?

*A SERVANT comes in*

SERVANT: Mistress, a messenger awaits without  
Bearing a chest of gifts from the lord David,  
Which, he vows, he must without fail deliver  
To your own hands.

HELENA: Ah, tokens from my love!

NURSE: A robe of cloth of gold enriched with  
pearls,  
Or turquoise armlets, or an Indian mirror,  
Proof of his wealth and generosity.

HELENA: Let him bring in the chest.

*The SERVANT goes out*

Yet I would ask  
Only one gift of him to-day—himself.  
The rest is dust and withered leaves to me.

NURSE: Veil yourself, child, before the porter comes.

HELENA *veils herself*. A PORTER *comes in, stooping under a great chest*

PORTER (*in a muffled voice*): My master sends his humblest salutations

To the lady Helena, and this interrogation:  
Whether her love for him is like his love,  
Strong as the firmament, to bear whatever  
Love may impose on it, whether she loves him  
Enough to take in love the gifts he sends,  
Whatever they may be—for I am not  
Even to rest the load with which I stoop  
Unless she assures me with her very mouth  
That David's choice makes the gift pleasant to her.

HELENA: Vain enquiry! Porter, set down the chest,

For there is nothing in the world I know  
That would not to the level of fine gold  
Be raised by David's choice.

PORTER (*throwing down the chest*): There's nothing in the chest,  
But I am David.

HELENA: O my soul!

DAVID: My love,  
Forgive the trick. My heart was so afire

That I could not refrain. Grant me forgiveness.

HELENA: Am I not pledged to take whatever gift  
You pleased to send me? Did you not bind my will  
With false devices and contrivances  
Before my brain could help me? And the oath  
You got from me holds firm.

DAVID: Oh, wretched man!  
On whom recoils his own unwieldy cannon  
To crush him. Helena, here is the oath  
Returned to you. Now drive me from your house  
With anger and with curses. I will bear  
Whatever you may please to put on me  
For penance.

HELENA: Well it is I gave the oath  
For you and me. Else 'twere my part to flee you,  
Bold as you are, who seek to penetrate  
Into my chamber ere the bridal day.  
But I am sworn and will not now unswear  
The oath that makes me happy.

DAVID: O, my heart,  
Think not by standing still to taste for ever  
The joy of this moment, and so die!  
Helena, what can I say? Words are colourless  
And gesture's nothing. All the real world  
Fades round this core of joy, and my old language  
Is useless for the needs of my new life.  
Helena, lift your veil——

NURSE: My fosterling,  
This plan was mine, the guilt is also mine.  
Drop your rash hand from the unlucky act,  
You know not what misfortune this will bring.

HELENA: My heart upon the sea of happiness  
Rides like a ship upon a lucky tide,

And I am driven by the winds of love  
Towards my harbour.

*She lifts her veil*

David, this is my face.

DAVID: I . . . cannot speak. Silence is strange.

NURSE: Unlucky!

Draw down your veil again, fall on your knees  
And pray to God that he will keep away  
The evil you invoke upon your head.

DAVID: Why do the words faint in my toiling  
brain

And die upon my tongue? I was more eloquent  
Upon your beauty ere I saw it.

HELENA:

David,

This is a solemn and more sacred day  
Than ever we shall know again. I give you  
Here in this glance the first-fruits of my beauty  
And of my spirit. As we take our earnest,  
So the full payment of our lives shall be,  
And in this moment of our joy the seed  
Of future joy or sorrow is sown in earth.

NURSE: O sorrow! sorrow! O unlucky me!  
My weakness has undone my fosterling.

HELENA: Peace, old woman. What guilt there be  
in this

I take upon my head, and all the peril.  
Should death now stop the spring and waste the  
waters,

David, one cup at least we shall have shared,  
And I am yours and you are mine for ever.

DAVID: On my head too the guilt, for now we  
share

Good things and bad alike. Give me your hand.

*She gives it*

I never thought to find myself so blest,  
Though all the city murmurs of your beauty  
And I have painted you against dark air  
Through the long nights as sleeplessly I lay,  
Revolving in my mind what all men said  
About you, worked and strove with wrestling  
thoughts.

How strange it is! For often I have said—  
If she be fair as I imagine her,  
In the great moment when she lifts her veil,  
My blood will stop, my heart confuse my eyes,  
And I shall faint before her. But now I see you,  
Fairer than ever I had thought you were,  
And dear, as closely dear as I remembered,  
I am at peace in body and in soul.

NURSE: Lady, lady!

HELENA: What is it, woman?

NURSE: Listen, there's a noise  
In the outer hall. . . .

*She runs and peers through the curtains*

It is my lord returned,  
But how disordered! Is our plot disclosed?

DAVID: Why, what's the matter? Does he come  
this way?

NURSE: He is distracted, murmurs as he limps  
About the hall, stares with fixed burning eyes  
And runs his trembling fingers through his beard  
That's torn already and clotted up with mud.  
O God, he has discovered us. Quick, quick!

HELENA: What is the matter?

NURSE: Much the matter, come:  
For I shall pay for this, perhaps with life.

HELENA: David! I grow dizzy.

DAVID: Belovèd!

NURSE: This bewilderment of love  
Makes you unhandy, but if you would thank me  
For aught that I have done, come to your senses.  
This way he still may 'scape. . . Too late, too late!  
My lord is lurching hither. Oh, it is rage  
That thus consumes him. How his eyes burn, how  
His hands lift up and snatch the air and fall  
Helpless again. His rage has driven him mad.  
All, all is lost. We are already slain.

HELENA: Not yet! Come, David, quickly. In his  
madness  
He might do you a hurt. Behind these curtains—  
We will deceive him.

DAVID *is pushed into concealment. A moment later*  
LEO *staggers, disordered, into the room*

Father, dearest father. . .

LEO: I am no more your father, call me not  
By such a name. Off! do not touch me, off!

HELENA: You are my father, I am still your  
daughter.

The link of love between us is not snapped,  
Try and you'll feel the fastening in your heart.

NURSE (*crouching*): O mighty master, spare, I am  
a sinner,

O spare, O spare, be pitiful in your rage!

LEO: Why does she kneel to me? Has she not heard  
That nobody need pray me any more?

HELENA: Belovèd father——

LEO: I am no more belov'd,  
I am not what I was, now I am nothing,  
A straw upon the gutter's brawling spate,  
A thing for jests, a madman, a poor beggar.  
Touch me not. Off! I am no longer Leo!  
No more your father—no more Chancellor!

HELENA: My dear, my master——

LEO: Peace, I am dishonoured.  
The master's shame abates the servant's pride,  
The father's shame is the child's death in life.  
Why have I lived to be a worthless thing,  
A remnant of humanity, a scrap  
Of rubbish idly thrown beside the road?  
Stretch not your hands towards me. If a king  
Can break his oath, forgetting twenty years,  
And reckoning that old loyalty a trifle,  
Why not a child? Seek my supplanter's house  
And be to him what you have been to me,  
While I was prosperous. Do not shrink and cringe:  
Too well I know that fear's a mask of shame.  
Do not expostulate with those wide eyes,  
For your amazement sears my heart again  
That was, I thought, this hour burnt up to ash.  
Oh, how it burns! I have not long to live,  
The world reels round me, the sky fades, I fall—  
Helena, help me. Helena, I cannot see.

*He sways and covers his face. HELENA supports him*

HELENA: Lay him upon the couch. The fit will  
pass.

These first outpourings of his vehemence  
Are like the opening of a turbulent spring

That after flows more gently.

*They help him to the couch and lay him on it*

NURSE:                         Dearest master,  
You know me, your old servant.

LEO: Are you here?  
Are you the last one left? Is not my palace  
Already empty and deserted?

HELENA: No,  
All are still here.

NURSE: How bloodshot are his eyes!

HELENA: Go fetch him drink.

NURSE: I rather will bring help,  
Lest in his madness he grow violent.

HELENA: Do as I bid you, go and fetch him drink.  
He will not hurt us.

*The NURSE goes out*

LEO: Closer, Helena,  
Come closer to my side and I will tell you—  
All powers, all graces, all authorities  
Are changed and given into other hands.  
Behind the sky Satan hath fought his battle  
And God is beaten and the Seraphim,  
Such as are faithful, haste His desperate flight  
Down the steep slopes of Heaven and tend His  
wounds,

Mop the dark blood that trickles from His flesh  
With their long hair.

And Satan's charger neighs in Paradise,  
And welcoming angels gather round the fiend  
To proffer him their duty. O, what we see  
Here on the earth is only a pale image



Of what they now transact in Paradise.  
What we have suffered here is nothing, nothing—  
That I have fallen, that I have lost my honours,  
Only a copy of celestial things,  
Nothing that I who was the Chancellor,  
Am scourged with rods and mocked by my own  
guards

As though I had stolen onions from a stall.  
There is no loyalty left, no truth, no trust,  
No star immovable in certainty  
That any man may steer by—or any woman.

HELENA: Ah me, my ruined father! O my lord,  
Cease thus to rub this poison in your wounds  
But rather let us with our care, our love,  
Pour balsam on the hurt.

LEO (*sitting up and speaking more calmly*): I am a  
fool.

What is my ruin in the whirl of things?  
For I am old and my best years are gone,  
And I at least have strutted in the light  
And the pleasant breath of power. But you, my  
daughter—

Listen, Helena, listen with forgiveness—  
Be strong to bear what time begets on you,  
For it shall not be David's child.

HELENA: Not David's!

LEO: Think you that now he will be glad to wed  
The daughter of a poor and broken man?  
Alas, my child, forgive me for this wrong,  
As I shall not forgive. What I have been  
I must regret for you. You cannot now  
Love me again as you were used to love,  
For I have spoilt your youth. All, all is gone,

My pride, my pomp, my power, dashed in the dust,  
And with them too your happiness and love.  
I am a fallen tree, whose rotten trunk  
The heart revolts from and would fain forget,  
But you're a flower, sweet still in scent and beauty,  
Cast in the road and heedless trampled on,  
And there's the greater pity.

HELENA

David is true!

Pity me not, it is an evil omen,  
Pity me not, I know, I know he loves me,  
Pity me not, he must not hear your doubt—  
O, if some echo of your doubt should drift  
Along the streets and light within his ear,  
How faithless he would hold us!

LEO:

But his father—

Curse neither of them, disaster is too strong.  
They both must needs desert me. All their fortune  
Hangs now on Jacob's nod.

*AARON has entered unseen*

AARON:

My injured friend!

LEO (*springing to his feet*): Aaron!

AARON:

Alas, alas, the heavy news!

I hardly dared to face you.

LEO:

O my friend!

AARON: Weep not, but let the will of God be  
done.

Who are we two, that even at our age  
We should imagine that we might have seen  
All the strange miracles of life performed  
And nothing left to amaze us?

LEO:

Had I said

That nothing strange remained for us to see,

Now I'd recant. What miracle of friendship  
Has brought you, Aaron, to the stricken bull  
Whom the wise herd desert?

AARON:

## A miracle?

Life is a miracle, and death, and love,  
And the smallest word that issues from man's  
mouth,

For we are wonderful creatures. Be not amazed:  
This is not more than these.

LEO:

Then God still reigns,

Still at His side the faithful angels fight,  
And victory is in dispute in heaven.

Aaron, I am a man

Whose soul is founded on a base of pride  
Which shaken there is nothing left to me.

I cannot live save in the good esteem

And honour of my fellows. And to-day

I have been disgraced, whipped like a paltry rogue,  
Cast over by the fool I most despised.

Aaron, you know me, you have known my deeds

These twenty years and more. Say, could I not

A dozen times have made the throne my own,

Blinded the king, exiled his family,

And reigned in peace? And still I held my hand

For loyalty. O, that's a foolish virtue!

Show it not, Aaron, but desert me too.

AARON: I will not, Leo.

LEO: And David and my daughter?

AARON: For my part, they shall wed as soon as  
may be.

He burns for her faithfully, and he sees  
Nought else in all the world.

LEO: But have you thought

How all your fortune rests at this man's will?  
You dare not anger him, you dare not join  
Alliance with the man whom he must still  
Both hate and fear.

AARON: I dare do and I shall.  
Leo, in all your lifetime have you known  
That ever I defaulted from my word  
In notes of hand, or goods, or monies promised  
To traders or my king? Then how much more  
In this impalpable and priceless gold  
Of friendship must I keep my plighted oath?

LEO: You are my friend, and I in your opinion  
Will hold my head as high as I have held it  
In all the world's.

AARON: Helena, yours the task  
To soothe your father and to comfort him.  
This will be your last service done to him;  
Soon you will be my daughter and David's wife.

HELENA: My lord, by the love and care I owe my  
father,  
I'll weigh the love and duty that are yours.

ANDREW *enters*

ANDREW: My business is with Leo, lately  
Chancellor.

LEO: You were my clerk and bore my pens. You  
know me:

Come you from my supplanter?

ANDREW: The lord Jacob,  
Who is now my master, sends to you his friendship  
And sends therewith a message in my mouth.

LEO: Speak on then. What says Jacob?

ANDREW: He bade me say

That well he knows what thoughts do swell your heart,

And that for those are wrathful and treasonable,  
Intending hurt to him or to the King,  
He has taken proper guard and you shall find,  
If you are mutinous and hate the whip,  
Like a trapped scorpion a ring of fire  
Wherein 'twere best for you to sting yourself  
And make an end. But for those harmless thoughts,  
Shame and regret and fear of things to come,  
He pities you, knowing how hard it is  
To be a beggar, starving and despised.  
And therefore, if your heart is meek and lowly,  
Wisely submissive to the will of God,  
He will be your friend and mollify the King,  
On one condition.

LEO (*with difficulty*): Tell me the terms.

ANDREW: Since he is rich but has no family,  
No wife nor children for his age's comfort,  
He seeks some virgin of a noble blood  
To share his heart, his greatness and his couch,  
And among all the maidens of the city  
His choice upon your daughter falls.

HELENA (*softly*): Dear God!

LEO: Dares he——

ANDREW: Stop, sir! I am to bid you ponder.  
Jacob is wise, tender and merciful,  
And will not take a hasty, harsh reply  
But rather waits the mellow fruit of reason.

LEO: My daughter is betrothed to Aaron's son  
And no delay can make it otherwise.

(To AARON): You kept your loyalty to me and I  
Will not betray it.

AARON: We are firm in this.

ANDREW: Now I perform the next part of my errand,

Which has some meaning in the first. You are Aaron the merchant?

AARON: You have said my name.

ANDREW: I have a charge to you.

AARON: From Jacob too?

ANDREW: From the Chancellor. He bids me greet you kindly.

Out of old love and brotherly affection,  
And say: I am ashamed, being so great,  
To owe the veriest trifle to a man  
So poor, so lately robbed of pride and hope,  
As Aaron is, now I am grown so great,  
And therefore I return his latest gift,  
Seeing that he may find a use for it,  
This begging-bowl.

*He gives the bowl to AARON*

AARON (*pale and trembling*): The begging-bowl.  
Ah, God!

*He lets it fall*

ANDREW: Lord Leo, in a calmer hour I hope  
To ask your answer to my lord. Farewell!

*ANDREW goes out*

HELENA: Aaron, what troubles you? This tells  
again

It is a beggar and a madman reigns.  
There's nothing worse in this than we have feared.

AARON: Ah, God, dear God! Look, what a trap  
is life!

The bowl, the begging-bowl. And I am come  
Nigh upon seventy years and I am rich  
And full of honours. Ah, the bowl, the bowl. . . .

HELENA: Aaron, my lord! He stares astray, his  
eyes

Turn upward in the lids and show the whites  
Swollen with angry veins.

LEO (*striding up and down*): This insolent!  
His words come like a breath of tainted air  
Out of the slums and nauseate my nostrils.  
Yet they have done me a service, filliped me  
To active anger again.

Aaron, if you and I stand side by side,  
We can unseat this beggar.

AARON: O my friend,  
You know not what you say. He is a devil.  
I am unmanned, I dare not join with you.  
Seventy years of honour, and the grave  
Must take my torn and mutilated corpse,  
For all is over.

LEO: What are these wild words?

AARON: All's over, all our friendship, our  
alliance,  
The marriage that we planned we must relinquish.  
Let us give up as easily as we may  
These toys of our last hours. Now let us part,  
Now better while we still have tongues to speak,  
For in the grave, whither we hasten fast,  
We shall be separate, and friendship there  
Shall count as nothing. Wind up our affairs  
And let us go, each to his lonely doom,  
Waste no more life in vain intrigue and toil,  
Give up while there is time.

LEO: Aaron, you rave!

AARON: My brain at least is sound. I know this man.

LEO: The beggar?

AARON: Yes. The beggar is my brother.

LEO: Your brother?

AARON: We were young together once  
And then I followed him and worshipped him.  
The swamps that Jack-a-lantern led me through  
Would sicken you to hear of. Still I followed,  
Admiring how he bore himself in all  
The town's adventures, through intrigues and  
brawls,

And strove to copy him. Until one night,  
Sitting together in a greasy tavern,  
He overcome with wine, I not so much,  
He bragged to me of all his evil deeds,  
Set what I knew in a more wicked light,  
And told me much I knew not of. That night  
I staggered home alone, drunk with despair  
Rather than liquor. All through the dark hours  
Those ghastly shadows stalked across my brain,  
The ruined men, the girls betrayed, the wife  
Seduced and left to meet her husband's vengeance,  
The trusting widow robbed of wealth and honour  
By Jacob's feint of love. A dozen times  
That night I left my couch in shaking terror,  
Sweating and staring through the unfriendly dark,  
Like a lost traveller who halts upon  
The narrow crumbling edge of an abyss,  
Which he has found, he fears, too late for safety.  
Thenceforward I forsook his company.  
Leo, you know me only since that day,



But tell me—since you have known me, have I not  
Followed the laws of God, have I not ever  
Striven in charity for the poor and fallen?  
All that I did was to redeem my crime  
In having been my brother's fellow. Thrice,  
When I was prosperous, he came to me,  
Begging for money, and three times I gave  
More than enough to live upon in honour.  
The fourth time he came whining to my door  
He had a ten thousand florins in a week,  
Purchasing who can tell what wickedness,  
And looking forth upon him unobserved  
I saw those shadows moving in his eyes,  
His red-rimmed cruel eyes, those ghastly shadows  
Of murdered goodness. . . . My cured blood re-  
volved

And in my anger then I swore an oath  
To make him one gift and the last. I sent him  
By a slave's hand, this bowl, this begging-bowl,  
Which he returns in mockery to me.

LEO (*bewildered*): I have no words to say.

AARON: There are no words,

Let silence be the end. Leo, farewell.

I would have joined you against man or devil,  
Not against Jacob. Now we meet no more.

I know not whether death will take me soon  
Or if I must drag out my life in woe.

But, Leo, think, my son. . . . This fate may spare  
My son if I am prudent. Never say  
A word again of what we planned for him.  
All that is over.

*He goes out, LEO following him*

LEO: Aaron, listen, Aaron. . . .

*He goes out. The NURSE returns*

NURSE: I did not dare break in on you. But  
now——

HELENA (*tonelessly*): Lead the lord David from  
his hiding-place  
And take him quickly hence.

*She turns away and stands motionless*

NURSE (*in a stealthy voice*): Come out, my lord,  
And follow me this way.

DAVID *comes out from behind the curtain and goes*  
to HELENA

DAVID: My love, my love,  
All I have heard dismayed me not so much  
As now to hear the music in your voice  
Lost, and to see you standing thus averse.  
Look up, my love. We are young, and courage  
still  
Yearns in our hearts more than our elders know.

NURSE: Vain words! O, now the woe I pro-  
phesied,  
The woe I brought upon my fosterling,  
Descends and all is ruin.

HELENA: Vain, vain words!  
Let the forefated woe strike me alone.  
Go, David, go. You have no part in me.  
Yet we exchanged our loves, wherefor I thank  
Gladly the heaven that strikes me now.

DAVID: Not yet  
Heaven turns against us, for our earnest given

Claims a full joy to come. I leave you now  
 Only to hasten to my father's house  
 And there to put new courage in his heart.  
 I shall not fail, for love is stronger much  
 Than all the devils in my uncle's breast,  
 Look up, Helena, look on me.

HELENA: O David,  
 If anything a virgin may bestow  
 Can give you double strength, ask it of me.  
 Or rather I will offer. Take my lips.

*As they embrace, the NURSE at the door becomes  
 agitated*

NURSE: You too must fly, child. Hither I see  
 coming  
 The devil-beggar with his train behind him.  
 Come to your father quickly.

DAVID: I shall wait  
 And see my devil-uncle and the devils  
 He brings along behind him on his way.  
 Go, dearest love, I'll come to you again.

HELENA: Good-bye, my dear, until we meet  
 again.

*They embrace again, and HELENA and the NURSE  
 slip out at the side. The BEGGAR, followed by  
 ANDREW and others, comes in at the main en-  
 trance. DAVID stands at the side of the door and  
 they pass him*

BEGGAR: This was the room where Leo kept his  
 women,  
 These were their silks, their cushions, here his girl

Prayed, sang, embroidered, used her father's riches.

Still a sweet perfume hangs upon the air  
That makes me dizzy. . . . O the luxury!  
The table's set indeed, but where's the dish?  
Where is the girl? No matter! she will come.  
This cushion did support her head and now  
How black my fingers leave their printing on it!  
Would she not shudder to see? This room is mine.  
I like their soft silks, like to wipe my face  
With hangings and embroideries they worked  
In hours of delicate and idle toil.  
I cannot have too much of ease. I'll take  
Ten years' back-pay of luxury to-night.  
They owe me that.

*He catches sight of DAVID*

Who is that fellow there?

Are you among my servants?

DAVID: No, I am not.

BEGGAR: But would be of them? Come, I like  
your face,

You shall be my familiar, I will teach you  
Much that you dream not even can be known,  
For I know men—and women. Come to me  
And let me put this collar on your neck  
That honours you and marks you for my service.  
What is your name?

DAVID: Jacob, my name is David.

BEGGAR (*starting to his feet*): My nephew?

DAVID: I am Aaron's son.

BEGGAR: His son?

Born and brought up with pride upon your lip,

No care, no anguish and no poverty  
To make you awkward. It's no miracle  
That you are handsome and stand up so well,  
But misery could change that soon enough.

DAVID: I stayed to see you: I have seen. Fare-  
well!

BEGGAR: Go not so soon from me. I like you,  
David.

You have a touch of me when I'd your age,  
Not like your crawling father. Stay with me.  
You cannot have the girl, but all besides  
That you desire I'll give you. Women love you,  
And I will show you how to get your fill  
And never risk a penny or your freedom.  
I will be as your father.

DAVID: Let me go!  
The gold robe covers half your dirt and sores  
But not an inch of your most filthy heart.

BEGGAR: Aaron and I were friends, when I was  
young  
And handsome as you now, and in his house  
I spent my happiest hours. How do you know  
That I am not your father?

DAVID: Let me go!

*He flings out of the room*

BEGGAR: Stop him! No, let the wretched boy  
escape.

These are but ghosts, Aaron, David and Leo,  
That with the rising sun must slink away,  
And now my sun is risen. This gold robe  
Impedes the light and heat. I'll tear it off  
And with my naked flesh enjoy the beams.

Andrew, order the feast, and you, my friends,  
Feast here with me to-night. These silks and  
hangings

Are for our pleasure, not to be used with care.  
Do with them what you will. Do as I do.

*He has torn off his golden robe of office, showing  
himself half-naked in his rags, and now he  
gathers cushions and pulls down curtains to lie on.  
As the others follow his example, the*

*Curtain falls*

## FOURTH SCENE

*A room in another and smaller house belonging to*

*LEO. LEO and ANDREW discovered.*

ANDREW: This morning hour is wisdom's, good  
my lord.

Will you now answer what my lord desires?

LEO: I have conned all night your message, and  
I find

No answer ready.

ANDREW: I must at once be gone.

Much business waits me and a press of letters.

LEO: Does then your master set to work so early?

ANDREW: He worked all night with dishes and  
with cups

And now he sleeps. But he has ordered me

To do what petty business must be done

And answer all requests as I think fit.

LEO: I did not so.

ANDREW: You did not, sir.

LEO: I see

You speak more mildly than before.

ANDREW: Dear lord,

I spoke with you according to my book

And even then erased some passages.

To-day I come without instruction, speaking

Even as my heart suggests.

LEO: Your head, perhaps?

ANDREW: Even so, my lord. You know me.

LEO: Very well,

And I can read a little in your eyes.

Deal with me plainly, fellow. I am Leo,

Whether disgraced or honoured.

ANDREW: I have seen

This Chancellor one day dispose his charge

And now no fear of him nor policy

Shall hinder me from showing you the love

That dwells within me.

LEO: Crack the nut and show

The heart of reason.

ANDREW: I have watched and seen

Stirring in Jacob's heart the very stuff

The man is made of. He's a beggar yet,

Angry, suspicious, and improvident,

Grasping with one hand, flinging with the other,

Now cringing in forgetfulness, then strutting

In conscious pomp to show his new estate,

And then reminding us that he has suffered

The pangs of indigence. He sits among

The pleasures of his lordly house as though

Some wizard should have touched his filthy hole,

Transforming it and leaving him the same.

Last night he summoned me to drink with him,

And gave me his own cup, wherein an amethyst

Gleamed at the bottom and assured the drink,

And then with fiery eyes and clawing hands

Plucked at my wrist before the draught was down,

Bidding me not to cheat a fellow-topér

By taking all at once.

LEO: You counsel me. . . .



ANDREW: Serve as the wind blows for a little while:

It will not be for long.

LEO: And so you come  
To take my answer back?

ANDREW: Thereon depends  
All of your fortune. Jacob holds his place  
A week, a month, or half a year maybe,  
And then the end will come, and then your turn,  
If still you live.

LEO: If still I live. . . . And so  
You bid me bend, send back a supple answer . . .

ANDREW: The other way is death. This man is  
foolish,

But swift in action and as ruinous  
As desert sand-storms that destroy the crops  
On the unshielded edge of our best lands.  
Be his fall ne'er so certain, while he rules  
In half an hour he may stamp out your house,  
And should he after fall, and should he die  
In lengthy torment of the stake or wheel,  
How would that help you?

LEO: So you bid me bend  
And give a cunning answer to the beggar,  
Promise to him my daughter . . . for a week. . . .

ANDREW: O, promise all that ever he desires.  
It is the price of safety.

LEO: But not pay?

ANDREW: O, pay, my lord, pay anything but  
life.

For at your death he can take what he will.  
Deny him nothing.

LEO: Deny not even my child,

A week, a month, or half a year . . . my daughter . . .  
This low, scabbed beggar, sitting in my seat. . . .

ANDREW: Lord, take my counsel!

LEO:

Silence! In my heart

Rise the old powers, the old longings fume and  
steam,

But in the cauldron's murk I see a face  
Most like the face of her I loved in youth,  
Whose life this daughter took from me, whose  
voice

Now whispers in the chambers of my mind.  
I cannot. Yet were I dead, there I am grappled,  
What were the profit? Riddle-making God,  
Why are Your traps so difficult? You, fellow,  
You know this beggar—did he covet your child,  
Your wife perhaps. . . . No, silence! In this hour,  
No man can counsel me.

*There is a long pause*

It shall be done.

Silence, again! Your cunning commendation  
Were wormwood in the poison. What I do,  
I know and count the cost, whereof you are  
ignorant.

I'll fetch my daughter now and you shall hear me  
Announce my will to her. Then, silent still,  
Leave us and tell your master.

*He claps his hand and the NURSE enters*

Bring my daughter.

*She bows, goes out, and returns with HELENA*

My child, I have decided on your life.

Since David and his father have renounced you,  
My mind is opened to another match  
Which in the new strange turn and whirl of things  
Greatly advantages me, and shall to you  
Preserve the former honours you enjoyed.  
In short, you are contracted soon to wed  
Jacob the Chancellor.

HELENA (*faintly*): The beggar? . . . Father!

LEO: Speak of your husband with more reverence,

Due to your lord and to the kingdom's lord.  
Fellow, you know what message to repeat.  
Go quickly. Stay not in mine eyes, but go,  
For if you linger, I shall change . . . or die. . . .

ANDREW *bows and goes out*

HELENA: I have not understood.

LEO: How should a woman  
Judge wisely on a grave affair of state  
Or even determine her own fortunes wisely?  
My word is spoken, daughter, and despatched  
Even now to your betrothed.

HELENA (*wailing*): Oh, no, no, no!

LEO: Be modest, girl. I would not think your heart

Inclines to David, whom you have not seen,  
Or, moved by lust indecent in your age,  
To any young man, choosing greedily,  
Rather than following with decent wisdom  
Your father's choice of one more fit to wed  
And cherish you. You, woman, see to her.

*He goes out*

NURSE: O my heart, my dearest heart,  
My love, my dove, come hither in my arms  
And put your head against my sunken breast.  
Hush, hush, no tears—

HELENA: I am not weeping, nurse.  
My tears, my blood, all natural movements are  
Stayed in my body, and the still breeding mind  
Lies like an empty mirror. Is this death?

NURSE: O cry, my pretty, let your tears have  
way.

HELENA: Whatever I may do, you bid the other.  
That is the world's way, nurse, is it not?  
I wonder what is David doing now.  
Is he cajoled from what he would?

NURSE: My sweet,  
Think on the glories that await you now,  
For at your age the past is gray and shrunken  
And the future swells with beauty and with hope.

HELENA: You laugh at me. Does any one, I  
wonder,  
Laugh now at David, bidding him consider  
How good it is to be a bachelor,  
How men, unknowing, marry termagants,  
How the fair'st wife sours on the husband's palate?  
It is early, nurse. The sun is hardly risen  
Above the tall crown of the tree out there.  
How shall we spend the day till dinner-time?  
Now you can show me how I should unravel  
The knot I made in broidering yesterday—  
Yesterday—before David came. You remember,  
I made the knot and would no more of it  
But cast the pattern and my needles down,  
And then we talked of David. Do not weep,

Dear nurse, for soon enough my tears will flow.  
 Now I am dumb. Let me not lose the hours  
 I still may spend in peace. But David still  
 Stands here before me and I feel no longing,  
 No sorrow, though his image thrusts upon  
 My listless eyes, clearer than you do, nurse,  
 Only there is no pity in his face,  
 No sorrow on his mouth or in his glance,  
 But calm, calm, calm—calm as my heart beats  
 now——

NURSE: What is that noise upon the balcony?

HELENA: I heard no sound.

NURSE: A scraping at the window . . .

HELENA: Open the lattice.

*The NURSE opens and DAVID jumps down into  
 the room*

Have the dreams begun  
 That will torment my mind and make a waste  
 Of doubtful shapes that mingle truth and lies  
 Instead of the real world?

DAVID: Love, it is I!

HELENA (*rising*): Oh, David. . . .

*She goes into his arms*

DAVID: Hush! your father's in the house,  
 And there are slaves below whom I evaded.

NURSE: Why have you come to her?

DAVID: To offer her  
 What she still has, if she remembers it,  
 A poor and all unmemorable gift—  
 My love.

HELENA: But that is done. The word is passed.

You and your father bow beneath the storm.  
My father hath accepted it, and gives me  
To Jacob.

DAVID: These are empty policies,  
The unwholesome scab that age leaves upon life,  
When the blood grows thin and is corruptible.  
We are young and lovers still.

HELENA: But division hath  
Severed our loves.

DAVID: Mine's grafted still on yours,  
Whether you regard it or not.

HELENA: These are sweet words,  
That have an aftertaste of bitterness.  
David, how can it profit us to change  
These empty speeches? Loud we may protest,  
Aye, and my heart will cry as loud as yours,  
That we are loyal. But the careless world  
Will brush our oaths away unratified.  
We should as soon to the huge desert-lion  
Bravely proclaim we are invincible.  
The end's the same.

DAVID: Have you no courage, love?  
Almost the words that shaped so easily,  
I so believed in them, fail upon my lips.  
Will you desert me?

HELENA: You must desert me, David.  
I pity you, as I pity my own life  
That must be waste henceforward.

DAVID: Come with me,  
Waste are the lands that we shall travel through,  
Yet blossomed by our love and not so waste  
As life without this spiritual flower.

HELENA: David. . . .

DAVID: O, I will guard you through the desert  
And fight for you, whether with men or beasts.  
I am a soldier.

HELENA: And you'll use your sword  
On beasts, and to protect our hunted lives  
As outlaws, when that lucky blade should lead you  
To honour and to greatness. There is none,  
Like you, my father says, in all the city,  
Born to command and be a mighty prince.

DAVID: Honour has left the city, it's outside,  
Gone through the gates, poor honour, to the  
desert,

Where we will seek it. I have loved my duty,  
As you have loved your father and your home,  
And I have dreamt of service and renown,  
But not for a vile place where love and loyalty  
Are counted vices. Now on us it falls  
To save this stray of broken lovely things  
Left to our people. All the rest is worthless.

HELENA: You bid me come with you?

DAVID: I offer you  
Love, and then, love, and nothing else but danger.  
I have considered, Helena, all the night  
What I should say, what do, whether I'd vanquish  
This love that seeks to drag you wandering out  
Into the waste, to scar your tender feet  
And make their soft palms callous, that would give  
Your flesh to rocks and thorns and sun and frost.  
All the night long I lay, debating this,  
And I am resolute. For, loving you,  
I offer you this fate.

NURSE: O, Helena,  
My dear, my charge, consider ere you answer,

And you, young man, do you consider too.  
You love her and you'd take her into danger,  
To want and death perhaps. But if she stays  
She shall be honoured and cherished all her life,  
And if she goes away from those who love her,  
Who will protect her after you are killed?  
And I—and I shall see her not again.

HELENA: David, you hear. Remember, you are a  
man,

Hardy and brave and used to enterprise.  
I am a woman, softly reared and taught,  
Accustomed (she will tell you) to cry out  
When with a needle's point my skin is pricked.  
You ask too much, I cannot come with you.

DAVID. Now I am strengthened, now I do  
demand

That you shall come with me, for I can see  
That only love withholds you. Would you else  
Accuse yourself of cowardice who have  
A soul of courage, firm and strong and hard  
As on the outward you are tender and sweet?  
Love, I have read your heart and know your secret  
And by that power I can command your life.

HELENA: Love, I will follow as you shall com-  
mand.

Unfold to me your will.

NURSE: O stay, for here  
You shall be cherished.

HELENA: In the beggar's arms?  
And owe to him my duty?

DAVID: This afternoon  
Beneath your window I will wait for you,  
When all the slaves in gross sleep overcome



The less will hear us.

HELENA:                      Gently call my name  
And I will come.

DAVID:                      Then by the Northern Gate,  
Whose keeper is my friend, we can escape,  
Thence, through the wood outside the city walls,  
A three days' journey comes to Trebizond.  
But we shall have the trackers at our heels  
And perilous woods and wastes to travel through.  
It is a slender chance I offer you.

HELENA: Gladly I take it.

DAVID:                      Till the hour, farewell!

HELENA: Farewell, my love, until the hour,  
farewell!

*The Curtain falls*

## FIFTH SCENE

*The same as in the Third Scene. All is now in a state of great disorder and uncleanness. ANDREW shows in LEO and AARON.*

LEO: This in a day, and all the state like this!  
Why has your master sent for us?

ANDREW: My lord,  
I do not know. His order only said  
That you should here await his present coming  
Among his officers and other suitors.

AARON: Does he intend us evil?

LEO: Still your fears.  
He hates us. Let him not by any sign,  
More than our needful plotting shall impose,  
Read that we dread him. Should a real terror  
Invade your heart, our purposes are lost.

ANDREW: I am not in place to tell you what my  
master

Intends you, if I knew it. I am to say  
He is the wise and merciful dispenser  
Of the King's will, whose servants are we all.  
I am sure he means no evil to the loyal.

LEO: I could have said so much. Indeed, I think  
That I first put the speech into your mouth.  
Henceforward when we visit in this house  
Tell us the first three words of the harangue

And we shall know the rest.

ANDREW:                    My lord, I beg  
Your leave to depart.

LEO: Go. Go.

ANDREW *goes out*

Look up, man. Fear should now be only feigned,  
And that only when there is one to watch.  
Cringe not unless we thereby somehow can  
Gain any profit. Cringing eats the soul  
And leaves a husk of man for enterprise.

AARON: I am afeared. My soul is eaten up,  
My will dissolved in acid of this trial.  
I was not gold. O, leave me, Leo, leave me,  
I fail you now, I am no fit companion  
For any man who still can carry sail  
Under this storm.

LEO: But I will convoy you,  
Dismasted body of a gallant ship,  
Into shoal water by a pleasant shore.  
I have not taken my old canvas down  
Of mastery and honesty and pride,  
Fitted these jury-sails of treachery  
And truckling and submission and deceit,  
To leave you rolling in the hungry wave.  
Play the next move, 'tis easy, and then see—  
Your heart will go as far.

AARON: I have no heart.  
I am a shell, a loathsome husk encrusted  
With all the black excrescences of terror  
And, inside, emptiness.

LEO: You have thrown the reins  
On panic's neck and ride unheeding on

To the abyss. But, Aaron, look at me,  
See what I dare. Not only do I venture  
To set my skill against the beggar's luck,  
But thereon stake my honesty, my pride,  
My daughter's happiness and honour, all  
That yesterday I prized in all the world.

AARON: But I, a ruined gamester, I have thrown  
All that I had away. Why did I not  
Keep him from beggary? O, tempt me not,  
Nay rather, trouble me not, I am not tempted,  
Who have no natural faculties to tickle.  
Leave me to find such end as best I can.

LEO: But, Aaron, I am still a man of deeds,  
Apt as you knew me once for plan and action.  
Have you not, in the years that now are dust,  
Backed with your treasure my rash enterprise,  
Put all your fortune on a throw of mine  
To make it twice or lose it? Well I know  
How once you stripped your house of plate, your  
wife

Of jewels, only to make up the amount.  
And now I ask you for a look, a smile,  
At most, and at the least I ask your patience  
To let me work.

AARON: I am bankrupt even of this.

LEO: Ah, God, if any man could shake me now  
That would you! For the gambler's dying throw,  
Must all the resolution come from me  
That I have need of? Would the cards were played  
That I might see the end! A darkness grows,  
Aaron, from your reluctance that obscures  
My faintly glimmering ember of resolve.  
I am *that* Leo—aye, and I have stooped

To lies that stain the tongue, and I have pledged  
Flesh and blood, my own darling flesh and blood,  
To further such deep ends as fear the light.  
Where am I borne? How can I marvel now  
That all grows dark around me, for my path  
Is like a traveller's, who with fading light  
Comes to the last edge of the pleasant plain,  
And, as his guide in heaven begins to fail,  
Sinks deep and deeper in a gloomy gorge,  
Where the vague track is by his eyes unseen  
And doubtful to his feet, where in the shadows  
Flowers are like eyes and bushes seem like men  
And stones astonish him to stammering.  
And should I falter, should I lose my way  
Or lose my reason in this ghast ravine,  
Not mine, but my child's life must pay the price!  
Thus stands a merchant racked, who has entrusted  
More than his charge allowed of others' goods  
Into a frail and perilous adventure,  
Thus stands he on the shore and sees his ship  
Struck by more gales than nature should command,  
Thrown on uncharted sands, wrecked by mis-  
chance.

I fear me, Aaron, what the end may be.  
Heaven hates the man that doth misuse his trust  
And to secure his keener punishment  
Strikes harder those whose trust he has betrayed.  
I fear me much for Helena. Do you not  
Wake at that name? Is then all care for David  
Gone with the rest? He loved her, and young men  
Take love of women hardly.

AARON: Be you pleased,  
Sir, to excuse me. I am quit of affairs,

An old man living out his life in private,  
Willing that others shall dispose of him.  
David this morning gave to me my quittance  
Of duty and of love, and we exchanged  
Our mutual obligations back again.

LEO: I fear me for Helena. If one should use  
A splinter of the Holy Cross for pledge,  
Given in surety to the infidel,  
Would God make thrive the bargain? My heart  
tells me

A cloudy tale of woe, like distant voices,  
Crying, crying, crying, I know not what,  
But there is death and ruin in the sound.

AARON: Leo, Leo, compose your looks and leave  
This unprofitable, violent lamentation.  
Stand further back and be not seen too soon.  
The Chancellor is coming, my brother's coming.

*JACOB enters in state, followed by ANDREW, the  
TREASURER, the PREFECT, and others. He seats  
himself in a chair on a dais. LEO stands forward*

LEO: Long live your lordship, with the people's  
blessing!

JACOB: I thank you, thank you for that greeting.

(To ANDREW) Tell me,  
What meant he, saying, "With the people's  
blessing"?

Did he intend a cunning reservation,  
Deducted from his duty?

ANDREW: No, my lord.

It is the usual form, as you will learn.

JACOB: Let him mean me no evil. Did he so,  
Even unwillingly and with the furthest

And darkest inch of his heart, I'd have it out.  
I'll have no treachery. What is the business?

ANDREW: It is upon these tablets writ, my lord,  
To summon first the Prefect of the City  
And ask him of his duty.

JACOB: So it is.  
Let him be called.

ANDREW: Stand out, your Excellency,  
My lord would speak with you.

PREFECT: I am here, my lord.  
What is your will with me?

JACOB: Have you performed  
All I commanded?

(To ANDREW) What did I command him?  
'Tis here so spiderish and ungainly writ  
I cannot read the first small word.

ANDREW: You ordered  
That he should bid his men throughout the city  
Salute whatever beggars they might meet  
Duly with ceremony and reverence  
Such as for prospering persons was reserved.  
This order gave you me with your own mouth:  
It is not there set down.

JACOB: You say it truly.  
How patly you remember! Come, my memory,  
Stand closer to my ear and hand. You, fellow,  
Did you my bidding?

PREFECT: Sir, I am no fellow.  
I ask the ceremony that I give,  
Not these uncouth, unseemly words.

JACOB: Dear Heaven!  
Who speaks to me? Do I stand ignorant  
In the awful presence of our lord the King?

Memory, tell me.

ANDREW: Sir, this is a man,  
Held as a worthy officer, whose rank  
Is high as his deserving.

JACOB: I've no measure  
To gauge the one or other. Tell me then,  
Most worthy officer, what I commanded  
Is it performed?

PREFECT: I gave my men the word.

ANDREW: That is enough.

JACOB: Enough: stand down, you man.  
What is the next?

ANDREW: The Treasurer. Stand forth!

TREASURER: I am here, my lord.

JACOB: Hark how his jangling keys  
Ring with the sound of gold instead of iron,  
Transmuted by the company they keep!

ANDREW (*whispering*): This is, my lord, the  
officer of state

Next to yourself, and much to be esteemed.

JACOB: What, does the memory speak unasked?  
Be silent,

I know these officers and all their ranks.

(*To the* TREASURER) I bade you reckon all the  
minted money

That in your keeping lies, and to compute  
How many suits of silk, how many feasts,  
Flute-players, dancing-girls, and downy beds  
To sleep the feasts away, it would provide.  
Have you then made the calculation?

TREASURER: Yea,  
Here is the scroll, my lord, although I know not  
Whereto you have desired it. Heavily



The charges of the state have drained my store  
Which lies at a low ebb, with wars and forays  
And soldiers eating up the solid gold.

And now to-day a new complaint comes in——

JACOB: A new complaint? Are there not old  
enough?

TREASURER: How down the river in the lower  
fields

A dam has burst and water flooded in,  
The crops destroyed, the houses washed away;  
And the poor people sit on crumbling hills  
Or shivering idly cruise in little boats  
Above their wave-washed homesteads. And they  
pray

Money for this, money to mend the dam,  
And buy them food, and huts, and tools, and seed,  
And make them happy as they were before.  
God knows, my lord, my heart bewails their fate,  
And yet—here's their petition that I hold—  
And yet, before I give it you, I beg you  
Look at it warily. It's writ so fair,  
So cunning, yet so plain, that human eyes  
Must needs drop water on it. But our dearth  
Forbids that we should send them any help.  
Bear it in mind, your lordship, as you read,  
We cannot help them.

*He offers the paper, which JACOB with a violent  
gesture rejects*

JACOB:                                   Tear the paper up!  
God with His finger pushed the dam aside,  
As with His finger me He placed in power.  
Since God intended this calamity

'Twere blasphemous to mend it, as it were  
If you, or you, or you should raise your hands  
To push me from the place I hold. But here  
I have a key to happiness for those  
Who have suffered their lives long, a talisman  
That shall undo the strictest bonds of fate.  
Think then no more upon the lucky folk  
Who, as you tell me, dwelt in houses, tilled  
The fertile fields and brought forth golden corn,  
Having wives, perhaps, and children at their  
    hearths,

hearths,  
 And fires to warm their flesh, and beds for sleep.  
 Why should we pity them? For they have known  
 Comfort and plenty and a sheltered rest  
 And easy stomachs, day on happy day,  
 Till God observed their joy and wickedness.  
 But these I speak for, lean and starved and cold,  
 Unhoused and friendless, drag their lives in

As I have done woe,

ANDREW (*whispering*): They stare at you, my lord,

They do not understand you.

JACOB:

If they could,

JACOB:  
Long since there were no beggars in the city.  
Listen, all you, how think you I came here?  
I, by whose empty bowl you passed and passed  
With hands unmoved towards your pockets?

Now

Now  
God has exalted me for no small reason—  
That justice may be done. Too long you waited,  
Forgetful of the hungry at your gate,  
And now the hungry sit in seats of power

And mean to be fed full. Lord Treasurer,  
Here is my order signed. Take it, and read.

*He flings a paper on the ground before the TREASURER,  
who picks it up*

TREASURER (*slowly*): This is no order . . . what  
. . . I cannot read it. . . .

So scrawled upon a dirty scrap of parchment—

JACOB: Trouble your puffy eyes to make it out  
And then perform exactly what I bid.

No questioning! The miracle that raised me  
Ceased not at that, the miracle continues.

My brain, my voice, are not as other men's

And will not be gainsaid. I am elected

That God His purpose may be here performed.

Hinder me not, it would be blasphemy!

You, fattened statesmen, have a lifetime spent

In prudence and benevolence, and nourished

All the good citizens just not so fat.

I am not so, I am sent to make a change.

See my lean hand and arm, and learn from them

I am the friend of those whom none has pitied!

Read, my lord Treasurer, read, and then perform.

*The TREASURER pores in a bewildered manner over  
the paper. JACOB stares round the room*

Is the man Leo here? Let him stand forth.

LEO: Lord Chancellor, I am here.

JACOB:

You sent to me

To-day a wiser message than yesterday.

LEO: Having considered, I answered.

JACOB:

Better so!

When will the girl be ready?

LEO: There must be  
An interval——

JACOB: I'll have no interval!  
You whose long life is filled with deeds and  
pleasure

May dream of pauses when you're growing old,  
But all my life has been a long attendance  
Upon this moment, and I have no time.  
We'll say to-morrow. Is the girl prepared?

LEO: Imagine, sir, the shock, the hesitation  
Becoming in a maiden——

JACOB: That she should be,  
And innocent, I hope. They say of her  
That she is fresh and sweet as a ripe fruit,  
Ready for picking, but yet never handled.

LEO: Sir, you speak strangely of my daughter.

JACOB: Strangely!  
And strangely may she take my first caresses,  
But I will teach her, I am not unskilled.

LEO (*muttering*): Were it but my own life——

TREASURER (*breaking in*): You have given me,  
My lord, some paper you did not intend.  
This is no order, but a random scribbling  
That means I know not what.

JACOB: You have made it out?

TREASURER: Give me the right command, and I  
will hasten  
To put it into action.

JACOB: Read the order.

TREASURER: But this, my lord, is not the——

JACOB: Read it out

TREASURER (*reading*): "All gold that lies within  
the Treasury

Upon a given hour to be conveyed  
To the Great Gate, thence strewn upon the street,  
The beggars first being warned." Then it is  
signed

By what, my lord, I take to be your name,  
But it's obscurely written.

JACOB: Truly signed!  
Perform, perform!

TREASURER: But this is not in earnest, this is only  
Last night's jocosity——

JACOB's *attention has wandered to a ragged and  
filthy* BEGGAR, *who stands in the doorway*

JACOB: To my side, my friend!  
The second, you, of all of us, to enter  
The rich man's house, but others shall come after.  
Here to my side, that I may honour you.

*He goes half-way across the room to greet the  
BEGGAR, takes him by the hand and leads him to  
a seat next to his own chair of state*

And what's the news with us? Good news, I hope.

BEGGAR (*hoarsely*): Sir, I must whisper, do not let  
them hear us.

JACOB: Stand off a little way, and do not listen.

*He leans over to the BEGGAR and they whisper  
together confidentially*

TREASURER: Lord Leo, you must help us, you  
must act.

LEO: Think for yourself, man. Can I find a plan  
For every new growth of this lunacy?  
You hold your office still, and I have found you  
Not quite unskilled in doing nothing when

The Chancellor has bidden you perform.  
Keep to your ground. For God's sake, give me  
time.

JACOB: Go, dearest friend, and do your best  
for me:

Our woes together promise me no less.

*The BEGGAR bows low and slinks out with a furtive  
look round at the company*

He brought me news that will be news for you,  
You, Leo, and you too, my dearest brother,  
You, Aaron, crouching in the shadow there,  
The younger darling of our father's house!  
How strangely we are met again! You see,  
I have not left you waiting at my door  
And sent a servant out to speak to you.  
I bid you in and speak to you myself.  
Come nearer, I will scrutinise your mouth,  
Which in its movements well I know, and read  
If what I tell you now is news to you,  
Or if you have conspired against me. Leo,  
Come closer too, my sight is sometimes dim.

LEO: Speak, sir, and tell us what we do not know.

JACOB: David and Helena are fled together  
And gone towards the Northern Gate.

LEO:

Are fled!

JACOB: I see you did not know, but if I will  
I may presume you did and made the plot,  
And you too, Aaron. David is your son  
And on this marriage you have set your hopes.  
He is your son, and he is fled away,  
Taking the girl from Leo's house, who knows  
With what connivance? But I'll have them back,

Both David and the girl . . . the girl . . . and  
David. . . .

She is my bride, you promised her to me,  
And he's a soldier who deserts his duty,  
Which he shall answer for, when I have caught him.  
And I shall catch him! Do not face me now  
With those dumb looks of confidence and pride.  
Your boy is dead, Aaron! Leo, your girl  
Shall pillow on her breast this matted head,  
When I have broken her. But soon! but soon!  
How slow seems all pursuit of that swift brightness,  
And I am old, my crowding impulses  
Outstrip the pace of these waste limbs. O soon!  
My time is not for long.

TREASURER (*hushed*): His demon drags him  
Into a fiendish ecstasy.

*The BEGGAR appears again in the doorway, more  
furtive than before*

JACOB: Again!  
What have you come to tell me?

*He goes to the door and he and the BEGGAR  
whisper together*

AARON: Leo, listen.  
All's come to the last hour and if I die  
It would not rob me of much. You wear a dagger.  
Give it to me and I will kill him.

LEO (*watching intently*): Here. . . .

*He puts the dagger into AARON's hand. ANDREW,  
who has moved unseen close to JACOB and the  
BEGGAR, now makes a sign to LEO and slips past  
them out of the door*

AARON (*beginning to cross towards JACOB*): I'll kill him while there's time.

JACOB (*throwing up his arms and yelling*): Bunglers! All bunglers!

*The BEGGAR rushes out, and JACOB after him*

AARON: Age cheated me, I was not quick enough.  
O, to have been in thought a murderer,  
And then too slow to deal the stroke! I am fit  
Only for death, I cannot what I would,  
Not even wickedness.

LEO: Silence, Aaron, silence!  
A moment's calm may give the game to us.  
Do you not see already how these people  
Murmur among themselves and turn their eyes  
In question on us, like a flock of clouds  
Halting and jostled by a change of wind?  
That's a good weather-sign!

ANDREW *returns and crosses the room to LEO,*  
*to whom he bows*

ANDREW: The King, my lord,  
Is at the gate.

LEO: The King?

ANDREW: I went to him,  
Seeing all else was vain, while the man Jacob  
Stood here a-whispering with his beggar-friend.  
I was not close enough to hear it all,  
But heard enough to frighten me, and went  
Upon the instant. Also I have despatched  
Two soldiers after them. Jacob is gone,  
But here they bring his friend.

*Two SOLDIERS come in, dragging the BEGGAR with them*



LEO:

And I will take responsibility.

Jacob is mad,

Tell me, you scoundrel, what's afoot, what plot  
Came you to whisper of?

BEGGAR:

Our Chancellor

Appointed me his officer. His business

Is not a plot, but you it is that work

Disloyally against us. Let me go.

LEO: *You*, do you say? Who, then?

BEGGAR:

We are the beggars,

And Jacob is our leader and we rule,

Call off your dogs, or Jacob when he comes

Will beat their rumps for them, and yours.

AARON:

The beggars!

They are risen and the city's in their hands.

BEGGAR: Aye, we are risen, by a miracle,

As Christ rose from the tomb. Behold our wounds,

Behold the gashes in our hands and feet,

And wonder at us. Yes, man, we arose,

When God with merciful thumb and finger  
plucked

Our Jacob from the gutter and set him up.

LEO: The man's beside himself. Order's too  
strong,

There is no miracle save in their hearts

Which gives them these mad visions. You're a spy

And brought your master news. Tell me, what  
news?

Where is he gone?

BEGGAR:

I will not be a traitor.

ANDREW: You may speak truth against your will.

LEO:

I am

A kind man and a merciful, but now

The cruellest of you all that ever baited  
A mangy kitten in the darkest alley  
To pass your leisure hours could not exceed  
My appetite for hurting. Tell me quickly,  
Where is your master gone? What did you tell him  
About my daughter's flight?

ANDREW:

My lord, the King!

*The KING enters, followed by his Guards*

KING: There, Leo, you have taken him prisoner,  
And just in time. He had such mischief working  
As might have pulled my kingdom on my head.  
Let him be slain at once.

LEO:

Your Majesty,

This is not your Chancellor.

KING:

You are Chancellor.

Resume the seals, find them among his rags.  
And do as you think fit.

LEO:

This is not Jacob.

KING: Not Jacob? With these rags and dirt, how  
can I

Tell the one scabby rascal from the other?

BEGGAR: Is it the King? O, then we are be-  
trayed!

The Heavens open and close again. They told us  
The King had changed his heart and joined our  
side.

ANDREW: Speak, while that tongue still lollops  
in your mouth.

BEGGAR: I will, I will, but only spare my tongue,  
Cut off my left hand, crop my ears, but spare me  
My tongue and eyes.

LEO:

Speak, and make no conditions.

BEGGAR: The lady, Leo's daughter, is escaped,  
This afternoon with David. I, on watch,  
I and some others, saw them leave the house  
And steal towards the Northern Gate. I hurried  
Here to my master, while the others followed.  
He bade me go again and bring them back,  
He bade us kill the boy if need there were  
But bring the girl again. And so I limped  
Fast as my feet would let me—you can see  
What poor things are my feet—across the city,  
And by the Northern Gate I found my friends  
On a cold scent. The boy and girl had slipped  
them

And were outside the walls. I hastened back  
To let my master know. He cursed at me  
And ran to join the rest of us who waited  
To have his orders, and by now they are  
All on the trail.

LEO: All on the trail! My daughter  
Is hunted through the forest by such hounds!  
Give me your guards, my lord, and let me  
follow,

We'll travel faster than these limping beasts  
And save the quarry from the pack.

KING: My friend,  
I, I myself, will come along with you  
And save your daughter, yes, and Aaron's son.  
Two such true subjects shall not be bereaved  
If by my help I can prevent it.

AARON: Come!  
The hunt is up.

BEGGAR: Lord, I have spoken, lord,  
Give me my life in guerdon.



## SIXTH SCENE

*A wood outside the city. It is growing dusk and the stage becomes darker as the scene goes on. Enter DAVID and HELENA.*

DAVID: Still there are no pursuers come in sight  
And we can rest a little and consider  
How we may cross the river.

HELENA: I must rest.  
Will you forgive me, David? If I do not,  
I'll limp and flag and be a burden, worse  
Than I have been already.

DAVID: See, my dear,  
This comfortable root. Sit down awhile,  
And when you're rested speak no more of burdens.  
Were you not weary, it had been unkind.

HELENA: Forgive me, love.

DAVID: All but this care of me.  
It seems as though you held my love too light,  
To spare it and give thanks so eagerly.

HELENA: Love . . .  
I love you . . . and then this . . . no, I'll pretend  
That I am showing you my love in this,  
In snatching you from fame and happiness  
To threatened wandering. I will be proud,  
And think you are hardly worth my sacrifice.  
Would you not so prefer me?

DAVID:

O Helena,

O, not this bitterness! I am to blame,  
But I have weighed and I will take the weight  
Of my decision. Better for us both  
To leave the city and to take our risk  
Outside the walls that once were all we honoured  
Than stay in such a hell as they have made.  
My sword! my sword! I feel as though my sword  
That made me walk so proud when it was new,  
Had crumpled at a stroke and shown itself  
Base metal, cheap and trumpery. We two  
Are better here, hungry and thirsty, better  
Than if we had stayed behind the walls and  
been

Without the courage of our appetites  
For honourable things.

HELENA:

I love you.

DAVID:

Dear,

Our love is what we seek, our love is honour,  
Goodness and peace, and we have turned our backs  
On all that is not love. Hard, hard to do!  
Gladly I spend the penny of my life  
But this large gold I take from you I know not  
How I may well invest.

HELENA:

I give it you

That you may use it as your own.

DAVID:

I must. . . .

*He starts to his feet and puts his hand on his sword*

HELENA: What do you hear?

DAVID:

A footstep in the wood.

*A PEASANT enters. DAVID lets his hand fall again*

PEASANT (*starting*): Who are you there?

DAVID: Two travellers benighted,  
Seeking the way towards the river. Friend,  
Can you assist me to it?

PEASANT: That is far:  
It grows already late. Good-night, my friend.

DAVID: A moment still. We do not know the  
way,  
Can you not help us?

PEASANT: Tell me who you are.

DAVID: Two travellers.

PEASANT: And whither travelling?

DAVID: Towards the river.

PEASANT: So you said before,  
And after that?

DAVID: I did not ask of you  
To guide me after that.

HELENA (*softly*): O, let him go.

DAVID (*softly*): I am not sure of him. How far  
is it?

PEASANT: Two miles by the right road. Good-  
night, my lord.

DAVID (*threateningly*): I have not finished. I will  
pay you well  
If you will guide us to the nearest ferry,  
And more if you can find us food and drink  
Upon the way.

PEASANT: Two travellers in the wood,  
Lost without food or drink so near the city!  
You'd best turn back and start again at dawn.  
Good-night, my lord, my supper will be cold.

HELENA: O, let him go, my dear, he will not  
help us.

DAVID: But he may meet—— No, fellow, do not move!

*He puts his hand again on his sword. The PEASANT sullenly grasps the stake he is carrying, but looks frightened*

HELENA (*rising suddenly*): David — David — David!

DAVID: Let go my hand!

HELENA: This is too like the beggar—like my father!

Kill this poor wretch, so we escape! O David, Have I reduced your sword to this? My friend, We do not mean to hurt you, we are frightened, For we are fugitives. We have done no harm, But we are flying from our enemies. You will not give us up to them. Go home And pardon us if we have frightened you. Good-night, and God go with you.

PEASANT: Good-night, lady.

*He runs out*

DAVID: Now you can let me go. I could not catch him,

Were I disposed to disobey you.

HELENA: David,

Look not so coldly and so harshly on me, I did not know such eyes were in your head. Have I done wrong?

DAVID: O love, you are my heart, And save you speak to me, I am a tiger, Heartless and cruel, swift to brutal anger. Before you had my heart I was not so.



And now my heartlessness has ruined you  
 In urging you to this rash flight. If daylight  
 Discovers us on this side of the river  
 Our hopes are small.

HELENA: Belovèd, did you once,  
 In your campaigning, cry: Should I advance  
 The foeman's sword will strike me, I shall die,  
 Therefore my prudence were to hang in rear  
 And 'scape the danger? You are foolish, David,  
 To think that I, a girl, am otherwise  
 Disposed than you in wars of my own life.  
 Your life, dear soldier, hangs upon your courage,  
 Which lost from you, the rest is nothing worth,  
 And women's on the wholeness of their love.  
 Once breach that shell, the true self drains away  
 And what remains would not be Helena,  
 Would not be Helena nor David's love,  
 And better far than that for me to die.

DAVID: My heart will bear no more. Despair  
 makes iron  
 The softest spirit. We will here repose  
 Until the morning. We have left the track  
 And maybe they will not discover us.  
 Fold here, my darling, in the covering darkness  
 And I will wrap you with my cloak.

HELENA: Good-night.  
 Sleep you, like me, in peace. I am at peace,  
 Because our love is safe.

DAVID: Good-night, dear love.

*He lies down beside her. After a moment or two,  
 the three BEGGARS come in, driving the PEASANT  
 before them*

FIRST BEGGAR: Is this the place?

PEASANT: I was so much afraid  
I did not notice well. The paths go here  
So twisty and them all so much alike——

SECOND BEGGAR: Where were they going?

PEASANT: They asked me for the ferry.

THIRD BEGGAR: How far is that?

PEASANT: Only a mile.

FIRST BEGGAR: Come quickly,  
They may have found it, Jacob's at our heels,  
We dare not fail him.

SECOND BEGGAR: He is mad to-night.  
Come on, you fellow.

*They hurry out, dragging the PEASANT with them*

HELENA (*waking*): There was some one here.

DAVID (*sleepily*): Nothing. The night is empty,  
sleep again,  
We shall find happiness in sleep to-night,  
Sleep, sleep again, beloved.

HELENA: O, my dear,  
Now when your eyes are closed I see again  
The little boy I played with long ago,  
Who loved me then and loves me still, whom I  
Loved then as now. Sleep, sleep again, my dear.

*There is a short pause, at the end of which*

JACOB *enters*

JACOB (*muttering*): I had forgotten what the  
country's like,  
The darkness, and the dews, and these damned  
roots  
God sets before me for a snare. Where are they,

The quarry or the hunt, no matter which?  
 The pretty hares are gone and my fell hounds  
 Lost after them in this abyss of night.  
 Those I first find shall pay for it, I'll show them  
 That I am Jacob, Chancellor and beggar,  
 Filled with the rage of palaces and gutters.  
 Come out and show yourselves, you beasts!

HELENA (*sighing*): My love,  
 I heard a sound.

DAVID (*springing up*): What? Where? The night  
 is still.

HELENA: Sleep, sleep again, I dreamt.

JACOB: None of us dream,  
 Sweet Helena, for now the waking comes!

DAVID: Who are you? Speak, I cannot see you.  
 JACOB: Soft,

David, for I am Jacob, am your uncle,  
 Your father's brother, boy, so reverently  
 Listen to what I tell you. While the moon,  
 That now with faint light tips these boughs, is  
 rising,

And ere it strikes the topmost, I shall kill you.  
 I hate you. I can see you on the ground  
 And blood agush from half a dozen wounds,  
 Not one enough to kill, but through them all  
 Your pampered veins will stream your death. And  
 then,

While there you sicken in your agony,  
 Back to the city will I drag my girl  
 Of whom you sought to rob me.

DAVID: Uncle Jacob,  
 Stand out where we can see each other.

HELENA: No!

What shall I do?

DAVID: Quiet.

JACOB: Quiet, my girl,  
You have no voice in this.

HELENA: I have a voice.  
I am the prize for which you two contend,  
Much as it shames me.

DAVID: You are love and honour.

JACOB: You are my revenge.

DAVID: That you shall never take!

*He draws his sword and strikes at JACOB, who parries. HELENA creeps round behind and is about to fling herself on JACOB's back*

Helena!

HELENA: Would you not have him killed?

DAVID: To kill a man in such a way!

JACOB: I am warned.

My thanks, good, honest boy.

*He coolly retreats a little way and sets his back against a tree*

HELENA: You might have killed him.

DAVID: Fool! there's no honour used in killing rats.

*He dashes in furiously, but JACOB defends himself*

JACOB: Hallo there, friends, if you are friends  
of mine,

Come this way quickly, for I need you. Come!

*The three BEGGARS, still dragging the PEASANT with them, run in. DAVID falls back, placing himself between HELENA and JACOB, so that she has her back to a tree-trunk*

Phew, but you nearly had me there, my nephew.  
I know the sword, but I am old and stiff,  
And sweat and pant if I but lift my arm.  
It makes me dizzy, but the running blood  
About my veins and this warm sweat that drops  
Give me a happiness I had forgotten.  
Come, we are kin and should be friends.

DAVID: Beware,  
Do not come nearer.

JACOB: Well, my friends, you are here,  
Much after me, though you were off before.

FIRST BEGGAR: We have been here before. We  
met this man,  
Who, questioned, told us he had seen our pair  
And said that he would lead us after them.  
He took us past this place towards the ferry,  
Whither, he swore, they went.

SECOND BEGGAR: We cannot doubt  
That he was bribed by them to lead us past.

JACOB: Indeed, my man?

PEASANT: My lord, it is not true!  
These here, the boy and girl, besought me first  
To guide them to the ferry. I refused,  
Knowing them fugitives and criminals,  
And when I met these gentlemen——

THE BEGGARS: Ha! ha!

JACOB: You are advanced. Proceed.

PEASANT: I brought them back  
As best I could, but it's so dark, the paths  
So many and so much alike, we missed them.

FIRST BEGGAR: A pitiful, poor story!

JACOB: Put him aside:  
I'll see to him when I have done with these.

You guard him, you. Three of us should suffice  
To tame my nephew. David, the last word!  
I offer to you all that's in my power,  
Except the girl, whom I must have myself.  
I would not kill you, you are young and brave  
And handsome. Stand aside and let me take her,  
And you shall live and be my son.

DAVID: I cannot,  
And why I cannot, if you understood,  
We were not enemies. I think you will  
Soon bear me down and maybe have your prize,  
But suddenly I feel I do not hate you,  
Poor blasted thing, whose fate it is to clutch  
At faith and beauty and destroy them always  
With dirty fingers. And what has made you so  
I cannot tell, but not your fault, I think,  
Nor is it mine that we must be at war  
Till one or both are dead. But you are right,  
We are alike, each one on his own side,  
And neither on the safe and middle path.

JACOB: I have strange, broken memories. . . .

*There is a long pause*

Begin!

We are wasting darkness.

*JACOB and two of the BEGGARS attack DAVID, who shelters HELENA behind him in a hollow of the tree-trunk. The THIRD BEGGAR stands aside, guarding the PEASANT*

FIRST BEGGAR (*falling back and panting*): Could we  
but get behind him!

PEASANT (*softly, to THIRD BEGGAR*): If I could push  
my stake between his legs

Phew, but you nearly had me there, my nephew.  
I know the sword, but I am old and stiff,  
And sweat and pant if I but lift my arm.  
It makes me dizzy, but the running blood  
About my veins and this warm sweat that drops  
Give me a happiness I had forgotten.  
Come, we are kin and should be friends.

DAVID: Beware,  
Do not come nearer.

JACOB: Well, my friends, you are here,  
Much after me, though you were off before.

FIRST BEGGAR: We have been here before. We  
met this man,  
Who, questioned, told us he had seen our pair  
And said that he would lead us after them.  
He took us past this place towards the ferry,  
Whither, he swore, they went.

SECOND BEGGAR: We cannot doubt  
That he was bribed by them to lead us past.

JACOB: Indeed, my man?

PEASANT: My lord, it is not true!  
These here, the boy and girl, besought me first  
To guide them to the ferry. I refused,  
Knowing them fugitives and criminals,  
And when I met these gentlemen——

THE BEGGARS: Ha! ha!

JACOB: You are advanced. Proceed.

PEASANT: I brought them back  
As best I could, but it's so dark, the paths  
So many and so much alike, we missed them.

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JACOB: Put him aside:  
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PEASANT (*softly, to THIRD BEGGAR*): If I could push  
 my stake between his legs



I'd have him down in half a minute.

THIRD BEGGAR: Good!

When they begin again, go in and try.

PEASANT: But if I do, then will you let me go?

THIRD BEGGAR: Our master will be grateful, I can promise.

JACOB: Wait till I get my breath again.

FIRST BEGGAR: The moon

Is rising and the night is wearing on.

JACOB (*hesitatingly*): A moment still. . . .

David, I'll offer you

Even the girl if you will be my son.

You are too fine a thing for me to kill you.

DAVID (*also hesitating*): Jacob, I wonder—could I trust your word . . . ?

HELENA: What, David, is my body worth your soul?

I will not lie with you if thus you win me,

Or, if I must, you shall embrace a husk

That's no more Helena than I should be

Were fate to throw me in the Beggar's bed.

JACOB: God, I must have the girl, he shall not have her.

Come at him, friends!

DAVID: Come, I am waiting here.

*The fight begins again. The PEASANT rushes up and trips DAVID with his stake. As DAVID falls, JACOB'S sword passes over him and strikes HELENA. The BEGGARS cut down DAVID as he endeavours to rise*

DAVID (*gasping*): Helena, have they hurt you? I am done——

HELENA: Save yourself, love! I am for ever safe.  
(*She dies.*)

DAVID: You sound so distant. Have you gone  
away? (*He dies.*)

JACOB: What have we done? Are they both  
dead? You did it,

You, fellow with the stake, prevailed where I  
With all my wrongs and all my mighty longings  
Could not beat down his sword. You had no  
wrongs,

Nothing but fears and baseness, and your deed  
Smears me with your own mud.

*He raises his sword, and the BEGGARS and the PEASANT  
slip away in terror into the darkness*

Both dead, both dead!

What have I done? What have I killed? O, once,  
How long ago, who knows, in my own breast  
I slew the fair fore-semblance of this brightness,  
Unmeaning then as now. A curse was mounted  
Upon my shoulders when I first was man  
That rides me still. Is this a dream, perhaps?  
An image of the life I might have had,  
If double-edged chance in mine own hand  
Had not destroyed it? I am old, old, old,  
Too far upon my way to travel back.  
Was there a David or a Helena  
Or have I dreamt them? Thus my dreams have

gone

So many years, a youth of fire and courage  
And this bold, lovely mate for him—my dreams  
That in my life I always killed. Ah, God,  
All my life long I have been Your endless beggar,

Crying for alms, crying for You to give  
 The single coin I needed, though I knew not  
 What it might be. And still along the streets  
 My lamentation rose of: Give, give, give!  
 But You have never given. It is too late,  
 Your mendicant must die in this cold night.  
 Give, give, ah God, why must I sue in vain,  
 Give me a penny, give a poor old man  
 A penny, for the love of God a penny. . . .

*He has sunk beside the bodies of DAVID and  
 HELENA into the posture of a beggar. His voice  
 has taken on again the beggar's whine. As he  
 utters the last lines, the moon shines out bril-  
 liantly and the KING, LEO and AARON enter,  
 with soldiers following*

AARON: I know we come too late.

LEO:

Jacob, stand up.

Where are they?

AARON: There!

LEO: My daughter and your son,

Both slain. We come too late.

JACOB: Give me a penny,

Give me a penny for the love of God

And I will make your name ring in my prayers. . . .

KING (*drawing his sword*): Die, evil hypocrite.

*He strikes JACOB down*

JACOB (*sprawling upon the ground*): It's not so  
 much . . .

A meal at best. . . .

*The KING strikes him again*

JACOB: Ah, God. . . . (*He dies.*)

KING: It grieves me much

That he should die with God upon his lips,  
But royal anger drove me.

*There is a pause*

Leo, Aaron,  
Our followers will gather up these bodies  
And bring them to the city reverently.  
Name you what day you will for funeral  
And I will show my love towards you both  
And walk the foremost of the train.

LEO:

My lord,

We thank you, with our duty.

(*To the SOLDIERS*) Bring them home.

*The Curtain falls*

## SONNET

SLEEP is the benediction after love.

The body's effort done, the soul comes in—

One love, one soul, one sleep! O, do not move,

Sink, sink with me in this abyss and win

Our peace from those dear labours. The world  
fades,

We have forced life to-night to our own will:

Now does no muscle ache, no nerve upbraids,

Like a gun charged and fired the flesh is still,

And we have hit the distant mark and know,

Beyond the old disquiet, love is peace,

Perpetual and inviolable, and O!

How like death's heaven is this full release,

This happy certitude, which we can keep

An æon, in love's benediction—sleep.

1925-1932

## AFTER SILENCE

A boy, I joined the others in the song  
And knew not whose the voice, my own or theirs.  
Time, passing, changes all these things. Who cares  
Whether I sang at all or for how long?  
But echoes of the chorus whisper still  
All year about my mind, and someone stares,  
Forgotten listener! with glance that dares  
Through dusty panes to warm the heart's long  
chill.

And I must answer. Hoarse throat, harsher tongue  
Must brave the danger of unpractised speech,  
And now, if both should fail, who takes the blame?  
Try with these halt words from my spirit wrung,  
And tell me—shall we share it, one half each?  
Who are you, listener? Are we both the same?

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## TO THE VEILED HELEN

HELEN, I held you in my arms  
And had from you the single kiss  
That freed my heart from yours and made me  
The symbol's slave, not yours.

Then, Helen, then I knew that I  
Would love one day and find my peace:  
You in my grasp, essential woman,  
Yielded that pledge to me.

To-day, a happy conqueror  
Of her and me and both our pain,  
To her, for you, I gave the wreath,  
To her gave Helen's flowers.

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## JULY FLOWERS

THEY come in clearings where the bluebells were,  
Tall, coarser-petalled weeds and florid bells.  
Rank, out of rank soil, their abundance wells,  
Flowers that our summer spouts and has no care.  
Nor do we care for them. No lovers wear  
Posies of willow-herb or meadow-sweet:  
Their scent and colour by unheeding feet  
Trampled go down and stand no longer there.  
Yet, though their earth be rank, they still are hers,  
And we who loved the year in her first youth  
May wear the emblems of her blowzier prime,  
Not judge among her children, better or worse,  
But take them, different signs of the same truth,  
Which, like our own, is governed still by time.

## EMBLEMS OF SUMMER

COME, baby, and you, younger baby, come,  
The nuts are in the hedge, the trees are full,  
The blackberries are ripe, there may be some  
Mushrooms for us in the next field to pull  
Out of their fairy-rings, dusky and green,  
And then we'll go into the wood and find,  
Lying ungathered on their beds of clean,  
Moist leaves, the beech-nuts with their prickly  
rind.

Come, baby, and you, younger baby, too,  
You emblems of my summer, come with me,  
And I will give the summer's fruits to you,  
Gathered by us from field and bush and tree.  
Your spring makes now my summer, therefore  
come  
With me whom spring's default so long made  
dumb.

## THE THUNDERSTORM

WHEN the storm burst on us, I lay alone  
And felt my house firm in the ravening air,  
Heard in the orchard boughs the cavernous moan  
Of the undertow of those strong gusts, my stare  
Fixed on the wall, where ever and again  
Flashed wide a window on the frenzied night,  
When through the blank dark of the empty pane  
Toppled the sudden breakers of fierce light.  
And ever with that opening I knew  
The rain through following darkness wildly  
hurled,  
Whips cutting up the earth's green wounds anew,  
Swift lover ravishing a willing world.  
Then, in a lull, I heard the branches weep  
One moment, and then knew no more than sleep.

## AFTER THE THUNDERSTORM

ALL night I laboured in the storm's embrace,  
Waking or sleeping, and now wake to yawn  
At the valley flooded with a steaming dawn  
And mists like sweat upon earth's weary face.  
And I am weary too: my heavy eyes  
Soon close again but are too tired for sleep.  
Deep in my flesh struck rain and lightning, deep,  
And what they made there cannot soon arise.  
The lightning in the air, the rain on earth,  
Loosed their twin impulses through endless night,  
Filled sky and mind with partnered dark and  
    bright,  
Gods of conception, furious for a birth,  
From ploughed fields, corn, from garden-beds, the  
    rose,  
From hills and meadows, grass, from me—who  
    knows?

## THE GARDEN

In the bright, gusty April of our days  
We search for changing weather here and there,  
Now asking rainier skies and now more fair,  
Seeking this soil or that wherein to raise  
The seed of a new blossom all must praise—  
Thus do all men, and thus I too have done,  
While through what winding paths my feet have  
run,  
Nor ever found the heart of any maze!  
Now in your garden let me, like a tree,  
Put down my roots and stretch my arms apart,  
A fruit-tree ripening on a southern wall,  
There in your eyes the ripening sun to see,  
And draw my sap for ever from your heart,  
And bear what fruit I may and let it fall.

## SEPTEMBER DEW

THE spider hangs her web from thorn to thorn,  
Or ties it to a wet uncertain leaf,  
Or in the late-cut cornfield on a sheaf  
That stackwards in an hour or two is borne.  
Not long her weaving shall remain untorn,  
Nor long can hold its burden of bright dew  
That gleams while day is new  
On hedge and grass and corn.

Sun, drink this vaporous hour into your sky,  
Breathe in these little worlds of light and fire,  
And from your noontide-opening mouth respire  
Your own light on my now cloud-soothèd eye.  
When I return this way there shall not lie  
These gossamers on any branch or blade:  
The worlds the dew-drops made  
Like this world too must die.

Like every world by us or nature made!  
Dew-drop or Sirius, or dream or plan,  
To image forth the thoughts of God or man,  
The web is torn, the dew must dry, they fade.  
Yet, it may be, this evening, when the shade  
Moves from the corner between wood and field,  
I shall find there revealed  
One web still not unmade—



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I shall find there revealed  
One web still not unmade—

One web whose dew, long shadow-guarded, lay  
To make new worlds out of this slanting light.  
And now on every strand they glimmer bright,  
And all their day this golden end of day.  
Long as their earlier brothers they shall stay,  
And like them shine, and like them show to me  
    An unguessed mystery,  
    And like them pass away.

## THE FOREST-FOUNTAIN REVISITED

FIVE years ago, in blinding weather,  
I came this way and saw the light  
Fierce on the stream and on the mountain  
And in my aching eyes too bright.

To-day the skies are gray and heavy,  
The dusty road no more is dust,  
The wind flings wildly in our faces  
Half snow, half rain, with every gust.

But still the silver shaft of water  
Springs to dark skies as then to blue,  
And with its shining and its rustling  
Pierces the sombre forest through.

And once again my heart stops beating,  
Seeing it bright in the dark wood,  
All the first wonder comes upon me,  
Standing again where then I stood.

A moment then, and now no longer!  
The day grows dark, the rain is cold.  
But—once again to have seen that fountain,  
Once more before the eyes grow old!

496 FOREST-FOUNTAIN REVISITED

These five years it has spouted upwards  
To meet the sun, to meet the rain,  
And now the fountain and its image  
In my own mind are met again.

## THE RAINBOW

Out of the cloud-chambers this sevenfold ray is  
thrown,

This mystery of light,  
A hundred times I have beheld the far-curved bow  
Stretched over hill and marsh,

Have seen the further limb melting behind the  
ridge

To an often trodden coomb,  
Guessed how on the sheep-worn turf the strange  
light must fall,  
On what familiar paths.

But never till to-day I saw the rainbow's end,  
Plain as a stooping shower,  
That sometimes we can watch from the hill-tops  
in sun  
Drench the dim roofs of home.

O, on that near-seen grove what drizzle of gold  
descends,  
On the willow's chill tassels,  
And on the willow-stems, tufted with these, and on  
Young shoots springing beneath!

O could I stand there now, there where I often  
stood,

Would not that showering gold  
My skin and flesh saturate, mingle in my veins,  
Transform this dull body?

And if one should go now into the willow-grove,  
Would he not find the buds  
Alight, still shining with traces of that caress,  
Like a girl fresh from love?

## FÊTE GALANTE: THE FOUNTAIN'S DECEPTION

Most like a shadow-show it seemed to him,  
That play of voices on the veil of sleep,  
For sleep had made their shapes and voices dim,  
Noon being now so warm, so soft the grass.  
He felt their babble and their laughter pass  
Across his mind as cloud-cast shadows creep  
Over a field asleep.

Phillis and Dorida, the fair, the brown!  
Pools in the woods, lakes in the hills, their eyes—  
Smooth waters to be rippled with surprise  
—O lovely moment! when . . .

His head slipped down

And gold his eyelids filled,  
The sun's gold that can gild  
The vainest dream upon a summer's day.  
He saw no more the fountain's jet ashake,  
But still within his dream the two might play,  
Yet to be chosen when desire should wake  
That sun and garden-scents and water-sounds had  
stilled.

Phillis and Dorida, the slim, the strong,  
The running girls, the laughing, the ever-playing!  
He heard their voices like a double song,



'The gush of laughter, the soft reply delaying,  
 Never upon a single cadence staying.  
 Soon might he stop the song  
 From these mouths issuing  
 (But which, O which of these?)  
 For only mouths by no man kissed can sing  
 (But which, when both alike so much can please?)

Smoother and deeper grows the veil of sleep,  
 But not so deep  
 That yet no voices in the dream sing on  
 And fill with promises his drowsing mind,  
 Till one small cloud obscures the sun  
 And, chilled, he awakens with a start to find  
 The garden empty and himself alone  
 —A little powder scattered, a handkerchief,  
 Left, as departing summer drops the first reddening  
 leaf—

Yet somehow, somewhere, living voices calling,  
 (The gush of laughter, the soft reply delaying,  
 Never upon a single cadence staying)  
 The fountain only with its double tone  
 Of water falling, rising, rising, falling,  
 That whispers to him: *Gone, gone, gone, gone, gone!*

## THE ROOM

THIS you have made your dear abode.  
Look round. The light on yonder wall,  
Down the long room and past your eyes,  
Does with a lovely lustre fall.

These walls you coloured and these floors  
At your best choice you carpeted,  
Brought from the garden in these flowers  
That on your desk their pollen shed.

Work on. Loved things around you stand,  
Servants of comfort and delight,  
Flowers, pictures, books you shall not see  
When this long room is filled with night.

Work on in joy. The sun goes down  
And on the walls the lustre pales:  
Still you shall work and still rejoice  
Till in your room the last light fails.

## MOUNT EVEREST

THERE lives a race of moths on Everest,  
Strong-winged and sombre-coloured, dul-  
patient.

When the wind blows,  
They fold their wings and grapple to the boi

Only in calm they fly, only in calm,  
And on those tortured heights the calm  
seldom,

But when it comes  
They rise and swirl about in airy flurries.

Only in windless hours they mount the air,  
Then only live, then only meet and marry:

And year by year  
Succeed the same strong patient generations

Thrice they have seen the giants from the p  
Camp in their midst, and on against the mou

And thrice have seen  
Downward with heavier steps the giants retu.

## THE BEACH OF SHELLS

THERE is a beach upon a western shore  
Which those who know it call the Beach of Shells  
For there the secret tides conspire to pour

Yearly a harvest raised in the deep-sea swells,  
The empty houses of bright water-things,  
In heaps of whorls and cones and fluted bells.

These hither a certain drift of current brings,  
And on a bayed shelf in the rock bestows  
Year after year their softly shining rings

Of lavender and pearl, umber and rose,  
Of iridescent sheen, dim-shaded dun,  
Of red that smoulders and of red that glows,

To lie there glistening beneath the sun,  
Beside the shouting or the singing sea,  
All beautiful, and empty every one.

Who knows how long ocean's fertility  
Hath borne this harvest or how many tides  
Have swept it to this blank tranquillity,

## MOUNT EVEREST

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Only in windless hours they mount the air,  
Then only live, then only meet and marry:  
And year by year  
Succeed the same strong patient generations.

Thrice they have seen the giants from the plains  
Camp in their midst, and on against the mountain,  
And thrice have seen  
Downward with heavier steps the giants returning.

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All beautiful, and empty every one.

Who knows how long ocean's fertility  
Hath borne this harvest or how many tides  
Have swept it to this blank tranquillity,

From where live water washes the rock's sides  
On which these generations lived and grew  
And where even now their enduring race abides?

For still, unseen beneath the covering blue,  
Their children make new houses, ring on ring,  
That hither shall be swept in season due,

And each a senseless, empty, lovely thing.  
But where these nations of the sea are laid,  
The passer-by who pauses, wondering

At how and when the Beach of Shells was made,  
Finds but few perfect, as when on their rock  
Each by its maker was inhabited.

The tide that threw them here with careless shock  
Has cracked the delicate walls, and passing feet  
Spread ruin every day with kick and knock,

And winter's frosts have worked, and summer's  
heat,  
To lay the intricate, vacant chambers bare,  
Where once the creature lived and found life  
sweet.

Would you know more than this, then kneel down  
there  
And dig a little with exploring hand,  
Finding more fragments still in every layer,  
Till last you find the shells all ground to sand.

## THE BAT IN DAYLIGHT

THE mountains on the one hand, on the other  
The sea, were filled with trembling sun, so bright  
That all the country seemed a bowl of radiance  
Filled to the rims wherever spilled the light.

But there was that dark tank beneath the olives  
Whose oily surface threw me back no gleam  
But drew the streaming sun to it and quenched it,  
As dark as dreamless sleep after a dream,

And over it, scarce visible in the shadow,  
A flickering shape, as though the shadow stirred,  
That swung and swung around in frenzied circles,  
Unlike the flight of any daylight bird.

It was a bat, drawn by some strange disaster  
To leave its shelter while the sun was high,  
And now above the tank it wheeled unceasing,  
Soothed by a semblance of its midnight sky,

And finding there a comfort and a safety  
It dared not leave, so ringed about with day,  
Though the still water waited to engulf it  
When it had flown its puny strength away.



O strange occurrence and familiar image!  
I wept, I did not wonder, at the sight  
Of this bewildered and unhappy brother  
Drawn by the darkness, anguished by the light.

## THE RETURN TO CAMPDEN

*To F. L. G., for his new house*

LATE, through a deepening evening, I returned,  
Uneasy lest all should not be the same,  
This building from its ancient fitness turned  
Or that new built for obstinate love to blame.

Soft through the rain and darkness still there shone  
Windows of earlier nights, and in my nose  
The smoky ghosts of wood-fires, long since gone,  
Charged with a sharp remembrance, pricked and  
rose.

. . . . .  
O, stones from the hillside dug so long ago,  
Did those who dug and brought you hither know  
What faith and hope in your close grain would  
grow?

Wool was your wealth, but sweet air from the wold  
Blew constant to invigorate your gold,  
The air that still is young while you are old.

Constant as that sweet breath to-day you stand,  
Last living witness in a changing land,  
Stone, and that golden, where all else is sand.

O strange occurrence and familiar image!  
I wept, I did not wonder, at the sight  
Of this bewildered and unhappy brother  
Drawn by the darkness, anguished by the light.

## SONG

SWEET love, when I come to bed  
And the pillow greets my head,  
The last word that you say  
Sends my last trouble away.  
"Love," you say, "dearest love,"  
And that word is enough.  
Then you turn but do not wake,  
Your body in my arms I take,  
Then you murmur, "Love, dear love,"  
And that murmur is enough.

Though smoke and profit eat our English earth,  
Though dole and talking hide the ensuing dearth,  
Here is the cradle of the certain birth.

Where beauty once has lived, her seed survives  
And to the surface through the rubble strives,  
O stones of Campden, in your stubborn lives.

. . . . .

Which stones can yet renew themselves. I see,  
New from foundation to the high roof-tree,  
A house that only love of them has made  
Yet built as their old handlers would have bade,  
A house in worship planned, wherein is shown,  
Written as plain as man can write in stone,  
The faith that what has been was not in vain  
And hope that what once was will come again.

## WINDY DAY ON MAIDEN CASTLE 511

Till the last atom shivers into light  
And the brief turmoil of our universe  
Ceases, and there's no longer dark or bright,  
Happiness or unhappiness, better or worse.

Still drives the wind and still the shadows run  
Across the bending grasses. Here, they say,  
Came in old times the Children of the Sun.  
And here a moment lights the sun to-day,  
A golden bird among the curling snakes,  
Faint, gone before the eye can see it well,  
A solitary gleam of gold that makes  
The darkness round it less endurable.  
The wise and kindly Children of the Sun,  
The old invaders who came armed with love,  
The innocent-hearted Children of the Sun,  
Do still their ghosts with these sad others move,  
Mourning a world grown crueller than theirs?  
Or are the golden gleam and that old tale  
Only man's dreaming of the future years,  
Which he must dream that courage may not fail?

The sky is heaped with cloud from rim to rim  
Which the wind herds before it, and the light  
That all day long has struggled now grows dim  
On ditch and rampart. It will soon be night.

## WINDY DAY ON MAIDEN CASTLE

THESE clouds that throw their shadows on the  
grass,

A flowing shade that writhes and disappears,  
These snakes of darkness that uncurl and pass,  
Image the passing of uncounted years.  
The long sound in the wind, the thin, shrill cry  
That travels with the wind across the ear,  
Repeats in airy, wordless mimicry  
Age-old complaints of dead men walking here.

Run, clouds! cry, wind! Perform your ancient play,  
You bat-voiced, shadowy players, on the steep  
Of Maiden Castle. Day on day on day  
Has dawned and lived and sunk into the sleep  
Of all the past, and now as dream arises  
To haunt the nights and days of living men,  
Whose own defeats and dreams and enterprises,  
Like those, in future minds will come again.  
How long past and how long to come, who knows?  
The capering shadows mime eternity,  
Saying: In a world of sorrow man arose  
And shall have sorrow everlastingly.  
Still with the galaxy our mournful earth  
Must bear along her always heavier load  
Of hate and disappointment, war and dearth,  
Until the heat-death wipes away the road,

## REALITY

NIGHTLONG it blew against my windows  
And shook the glass against the wincing frames:  
Nightlong, I know, the sea beyond the cliff-tops  
Beat on the chalk and churned in creamy coils.  
In all the noise I slept and dreamt, my breathing  
Mingling with hers, whose body close to mine  
Created for me this small round of substance,  
This little real world within a dream.